



BREAKERS AHEAD

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(from S. C.)

BREAKERS AHEAD!

BY THE SAME AUTHOR



THAT MAINWARING AFFAIR

12th Edition



AT THE TIME APPOINTED

10th Edition



“AND I—HAVE LOST”

BREAKERS AHEAD

BY
A. MAYNARD BARBOUR

AUTHOR OF "THAT MAINWARING AFFAIR;" "AT
THE TIME APPOINTED," ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE

by
JAMES L. WOOD

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I

THE CRISIS

“IF I hadn’t been such an egregious ass !”

Thomas Macavoy Denning kicked viciously at a small stone lying at his feet, sending it spinning down the mountain side. A chipmunk, that had been regarding him inquisitively from a log opposite, taking alarm, flashed up the nearest tree trunk and along the low boughs, seating himself above Denning’s head, where he poured forth a torrent of noisy objurgation.

“I seem to possess the faculty for making a consummate fool of myself ! I don’t know whether it’s congenital or acquired,” Denning continued.

The chipmunk appeared to consider this remark particularly offensive, for, in his excitement, he dropped the nut he was holding, directly upon Denning’s broad back, whence it rolled unheeded to the ground.

“This is the worst ! And it will be the last, too,” he soliloquized, grinding his heel into the soft earth. “They say a burnt child dreads the fire ; I think I’ll let it jolly well alone hereafter. I’ve been singed before, but this is a scorcher, by Jove !”

He was seated part way up the timbered mountain, on the stump from which the log opposite had been sawn, his cap pulled low over his eyes against the

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rays of the setting sun which came nearly straight across the intervening valley. His elbows rested on his knees ; one hand hung downward listlessly, while the other held an English briar pipe in which the fire had long since died.

Overhead, but farther up the tree, the chipmunk still chattered and scolded. From the warm, brown earth, with its scent of newly fallen leaves, came the strident chirp of crickets. Down in the valley the crows called lazily to one another, their harsh voices mellowed by the distance. But these sounds were only part of the silence of an October afternoon ; a silence which gradually wrought its soothing spell on Denning. His muttered, broken soliloquies ceased ; he sat silent, motionless, gazing with unseeing eyes upon the valley spread out before him like an immense canvas.

Suddenly he roused with a slight start and seemed to be mentally pulling himself together. Glancing at his pipe and seeing it had gone out, he emptied the ashes and proceeded to refill it, pressing the tobacco into the bowl with peculiar deliberation. When he had lighted it and tossed the match aside, he clasped his hands lightly and sat regarding them with curious, absent-minded attention. They were slim, supple hands, browned by exposure to sun and wind, but well moulded, while the skin showed underneath its coat of tan, a fineness and delicacy of texture that indicated several generations of good blood. The long, slim fingers did not taper, however ; instead, they showed the firmly rounded tips that accompany a temperament executive and practical, rather than æsthetic or sentimental.

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A movement on the canvas before him recalled him. A man, gray, grizzled, weather-beaten, was riding slowly along the narrow road at the foot of the mountain. He was seated sidewise on a horse of advanced age and melancholy aspect, whose dilapidated harness, dangling against his emaciated sides, had been supplemented here and there with rope. The man rode with head sunk forward on his breast, and with each movement of the animal beneath him, his long, lank body rocked back and forth with an undulatory motion. Neither horse nor rider seemed really a thing of life, but rather, a huge, unwieldy automaton moving mechanically across the scene.

As Denning watched them, his lip curled and there flashed upon his mental vision the picture of a man of fifty-five, of fine physique, erect; with closely cut, iron-gray hair and English side-whiskers; with eyes like steel—as keen and as hard and cold—seated in the private office of a large banking house in one of England's oldest and busiest towns; the hale and hearty representative of four generations of bankers and brokers.

The memory stung him to action. His listless attitude changed. He straightened himself, and pushing back his cap, disclosed a pair of eyes the counterpart of his father's—the English banker. Drawing two letters from his pocket, each post-marked New York and addressed to T. Macavoy Denning, he opened and read them.

He was already partially familiar with their contents, having received them a few days earlier. At the time of their receipt he had given them little thought, however. But immediately thereafter, the

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unexpected had happened ; the whole tenor of his life had suddenly been changed, and by reason of the change, these letters now appealed to him most forcibly.

One was a business letter from a New York syndicate, and enclosed within it was a contract for his signature. The other was from a chum of Denning's, and to most its chirography would have been as intelligible as Sanscrit, but his familiarity with it and the writer enabled him to decipher it readily. It was brief and as follows :

MAC, OLD BOY :

Along with this you will receive a communication from the B. & W., which I think will interest you. It will give full particulars, so I won't go into details. Enough to say that anything the B. & W. take hold of is apt to be pretty good, and this South American proposition seems to me unusually attractive. Besides, for two fellows like you and me, that keep their eyes open, there's likely to be some chances on the side worth taking—understand? It will take from three to five years to put the scheme through, but in my opinion it will be time well invested.

Of course, I am aware that the proposition may not strike a "gay Lothario" like yourself so favorably as it does me—a blasé old stager who has got down to business—but by way of special inducement I'll add that there's any number of pretty Spanish girls down there—quite the real thing—and I can act the rôle of elderly male chaperon to perfection, should you need one—you know I'm nearly two years your senior.

Hoping we can count you in on this,

Yours as ever,

HOLLINGSHEAD.

Denning winced at the allusion in the last paragraph : "Pity Dick hadn't been along to 'chaperon'

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me here !” he muttered, with a smile of self-contempt. “ Well, there’ll be no more of it. I’ll get ‘down to business’ myself and I’ll hit straight from the shoulder, too !”

He read the contract again thoughtfully ; then folded the papers with an air of decision.

“ I’ll do it, by Jove !”

“ Do what, Tom ?”

Denning frowned as he replaced the letters in his pocket, but he neither replied nor turned his head.

A girl, tall, slender, her body lithe and supple as a young willow, came up the foot-path with the long, swinging step of those born and bred in the mountains. Passing in front of Denning, she stopped, regarding him questioningly for a moment, then seated herself on the log previously occupied by the chipmunk.

The faint flush on her cheek, the eager little smile trembling on her lips, faded as their eyes met. Her limp cotton gown fell loosely about her, revealing the outlines of a form as yet lacking much of the grace and beauty which a few more years would bring. Her attitude unconsciously betokened dejection. She clasped her hands nervously and resting her chin upon them, gazed at Denning, the troubled perplexity in her eyes deepening. There is a class of people unaccustomed to definite, logical thought. Unable to think, they only feel ; and in this dumb, helpless way, she felt an inexplicable change in Denning and the dull pain resulting therefrom, without being able to account for the one, or to analyze or define the other.

For a few moments Denning smoked in silence, his eyes upon her face. All the romance of the past

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weeks had been dissipated by hard fact, and in its clear, uncompromising light, nothing wore the same aspect as before. Looking upon the shrinking, forlorn figure, the sunbrowned, childish face, he wondered at the infatuation which had possessed him. Wherein had lain its spell? What had been the attraction? It must have been, he concluded mentally, the time and place; the psychological moment for him to make a blithering idiot of himself.

The girl, feeling the cold scrutiny of his gaze, had dropped her eyes. Now, she suddenly raised them, and Denning understood the why and the wherefore. Brown eyes they were, large, soft, timid as a fawn's and yet trustful; reflecting in their limpid depths every shade of feeling of the guileless, confiding nature underneath. Even now, they touched him with their pathos, their tender, wistful appeal, like the eyes of a dumb creature that suffers—it knows not why.

"What brought you up here, Milly?" he asked, not unkindly.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied hesitatingly, "I just came, I guess." Then, gathering more courage, she added, "I knew you was up here, and 'twas coming supper time and I thought maybe I'd meet you and we'd go back together—like we used to."

Denning made no reply. The silence distressed her. She twisted her small brown fingers nervously.

"Tom?"

"Well?"

"Are you angry with me?"

"No."

"It seems just like you was."

Another silence.

THE CRISIS

“You seem so different from what you was before—before——”

“Everything has changed since then, Milly.”

“I haven’t changed, Tom.”

“Not consciously, perhaps ; but our relations are changed, which is practically the same thing. They can never be again what they were before, consequently, we can never be the same again.”

His words struck the death-blow to the poor little hopes she had been cherishing, but she did not cry out, or make any sign ; only the childish face grew piteously drawn and tense in her effort to keep back the tears, while a few drops that would not be controlled plashed over the tightly interlaced fingers. The sight of them irritated Denning, but he resolved not to be unkind—at least, not what he considered unkind.

“It’s hard lines, I know,” he said, “and harder for me than for you—in ways you don’t and can’t understand—but that’s no more than fair, for I’ve only my own drivelling idiocy to blame for it all. I don’t blame you.”

He thought he spoke magnanimously, but his words cut her deeply. Her intuitions were keen, and she felt instinctively what she could not have put into words, that by the act which had saved her from disgrace, he considered he had irretrievably disgraced himself.

Pride helped her to restrain her tears and rang in her voice, as she replied :

“Tom, I want you to know it was all pa’s doings. I never would ’ave done it if pa hadn’t made me ; *never*,” she protested passionately, “no matter what happened !”

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"I know that, Milly. Don't let us talk about it."

In the silence that followed a faint tintinnabulation sounded from the valley below.

"There's the supper bell," she announced, rising, but as Denning made no move, she hesitated.

"Go on, down," he answered, without looking at her.

"But, ain't you coming?"

"Not now. I'll come later; don't wait for me."

She turned, then paused, a half defined fear at her heart and in her eyes.

"Tom, when I came up, you was saying something about—about something you was going to do; what was it?"

"Only something in connection with my work. Go on."

Without another word or a glance backward, she went down the mountain-path. Though tears blinded her eyes, she held her small head erect, and the pathetic figure in its poor little cotton gown, had, after all, an unconscious dignity.

When she had passed the first turn in the path, Denning arose, emptied his pipe with careful deliberation, and putting it in its case, closed the latter with a loud, decisive snap that seemed to indicate some important decision taken in his own mind. He stood for a moment looking off into the distance, his mouth tightening, his steel-blue eyes growing hard and cold. Then, he, too, took the path down the mountain.

II

WILD OATS

MAC DENNING, as he was familiarly known, was of good English and Scotch blood. He was the third of five sons, and, possessing a nature far more flexible than that of either his elder or younger brothers, he soon developed traits utterly at variance with, and antagonistic to, the undeviating usages of the long established line of Dennings or the ancient clan of Macavoy. He was not vicious, only "an unco triflin' lad" and this "triflin'" propensity grew with his growth until, at the age of twenty-one, he had no essential virtues and no extraordinary vices. He was prime favorite among his class-mates at college, the leading spirit of the fraternities, popular with sou-brettes and chorus girls, and universally declared to be "not a half bad sort, you know." He was a healthy, irresponsible, devil-may-care fellow, whose mental and moral hereditaments, descended from long generations, were buried so deeply that they rarely came to the surface, and only on occasions when he was thoroughly aroused. These occasions constituted the epochs of his life.

The first epoch occurred within a few months of his prospective graduation. The report of a certain *affaire d'amour* having reached the individual and collective ears of the college faculty, Denning was sus-

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pended. Such a proceeding inevitably awakened some of those ancestral traits so long dormant, and the first to find its way to the surface was the Scotch stubbornness. He refused to explain or apologize ; to express any regret for the past, or promise any amendment for the future, and was therefore expelled.

He at once started for home, but a report from the faculty had preceded him. On his arrival at the station, he was met by an employé of his father's bank—a menial in gilt braid and buttons—bearing a note from that worthy gentleman demanding his immediate presence in his office.

The picture of his father as they met was never effaced from his memory. All his after recollections of him were those of an elderly, irate English gentleman, rigidly erect at his desk in an elegantly appointed office, each individual hair on his shapely, iron-gray head seeming to bristle with indignation.

A stormy scene followed, in which young Denning's Scotch stubbornness speedily developed into English obstinacy. When, as a finale, his father forbade his entering the home under any circumstances and cut his allowance down to a beggarly five hundred pounds a quarter, at the same time tendering a check for the first instalment, he tore the check in pieces, threw the fragments on his father's desk and left the room.

A bank official was hastily dispatched after him, but the young British scion was nowhere to be seen, having jumped into the first hansom which offered itself and which was speedily swallowed up in the crowd. Driving to another bank where he had a tidy little sum in his own name—the bequest of a maternal uncle—he drew out enough for present needs and

WILD OATS

took the first train for Liverpool, whence he sailed for the United States.

Upon his arrival, he suddenly realized what his revenge was costing him. A great tidal wave of homesickness swept over him, threatening to engulf him, but by pure contumacy he pulled through, and to sever the last possible tie connecting him with the old world, as soon as practicable, took out his first naturalization papers.

He soon made the acquaintance of another disaffected young Englishman, Dick Hollingshead, who speedily introduced him to what he termed "the real thing." Denning was not long in attaining the same popularity in certain New York clubs which he had enjoyed among his college fraternities, while to the charms of the American girl, in her bewildering and bewitching variety, he proved particularly susceptible.

Hollingshead, a cool, level-headed fellow, was a mine expert of exceptional ability and his commissions for the various syndicates employing him carried him wherever valuable mining properties were to be examined and reported upon. On one of his western trips, Denning had accompanied him, receiving, amid many novel sensations, an impression of the remarkable resources and possibilities of the country through which he passed, retained by his practical mind for many succeeding years. Hollingshead's leisure time, between these irregular trips, was spent "with the boys," but he never allowed his dissipations to carry him beyond a certain point.

Two years of New York life—involving a series of unsuccessful speculations—effected a serious diminu-

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tion in Denning's exchequer. After footing up his losses, he made the astounding discovery that his prospective income would be something considerably less than the niggardly allowance his father had allotted him; indeed, the scorned five hundred a quarter loomed up in quite colossal proportions by comparison. He took Hollingshead into his confidence and the latter, finding him familiar with the various branches of applied mathematics, turned him over to a syndicate desirous of obtaining a surveyor for the private survey of several large areas of mountainous country, preparatory to the purchase of some coal lands.

About the same time, Denning's latest divinity, feminine,—perhaps because she "divined" his ebbing fortune, or possibly owing to an inkling of some previous amour—transferred her smiles and favors to a more opulent suitor. This fact may have contributed to the willingness with which he accepted the syndicate's commission. In the solitude of the mountains he might mend his fortune and his heart at the same time. Neither was broken, but each a little out of repair.

One of his club associates, on hearing of his departure, exclaimed, with his usual delicacy of feeling:

"Buried himself in the backwoods, has he? Gad! I wonder if nymphs and dryads will fill the bill!"

He found, however, neither nymph nor dryad; only a country girl, a mountaineer's child, uneducated, unsophisticated. She was not even beautiful, except with the natural, winsome beauty of the wild-flowers that smiled up into his face from the mountain sides and which he unheedingly crushed beneath

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his feet. She had a warm heart and a vivid imagination, with a sensitive nature, keenly intuitive, though lacking the ability to define, even to herself, her impressions and intuitions. She felt vaguely that Denning was of a world above and beyond her own and, woman-like worshipped him accordingly.

To him, the little rustic was only a new type of femininity, the more interesting because novel. Her shy, gentle homage he found rather soothing to his wounded vanity and graciously accepted it. What more could a devotee ask of its idol? Perhaps, as Denning afterward reasoned, the psychological moment for both had arrived.

She was the only daughter of the family with which he boarded. It was she who, with jealous care, prepared the lunch he took with him on his daily journey into the mountains; who kept his room spotless, and bright with flowers, her fingers lingering with caressing touch on the books and various articles belonging to him, her thoughts weaving strange, happy fancies of him through the long, dreamy, summer days. What more natural than that, as the shadows lengthened, she should go up the familiar path to meet him and they should saunter homeward together, loitering here and there, gathering the late flowers, or resting on the sun-flecked, moss-carpeted earth beneath the Gothic arches of the forest, both of them children of Nature, though so widely separated by birth and breeding.

So the weeks passed, as in a dream; and then had come the awakening. The dull, sluggish minds of the parents were finally aroused. Angry questions and incriminations were followed by admissions, tearful

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and shamefaced on the part of the girl, dogged and sullen on Denning's part. Before the loud vituperation of the father, whose threats and curses fell impartially on the unhappy couple, Denning's defiance gradually gave way to diplomacy, but both were alike futile.

A day or two later, there appeared in the weekly paper published in Alton, a village five miles distant, the following notice :

DENNING-HELDT—By Justice Hartley, October 7, 18—,
Thomas M. Denning and Millicent Heldt.

Denning's only consolation as he read the foregoing lines, was that the circulation of the paper was exceedingly limited, and Thomas M. Denning was a name unfamiliar to his associates.

With the event recorded in those few words occurred the second epoch in Denning's life.

III

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

POSSIBLY some of Denning's associates might scarcely have recognized him as he returned to the house that evening, so great a change had been wrought in him since leaving it in the early afternoon. He had grown years older in those few hours on the mountain side. His youth, with its foibles and follies, had dropped from him, as the domino drops from the masquerader when the rout is over, and the man, as Nature intended him, stood forth unveiled; the son, not only of his father, but of his forefathers. His bearing, his every movement, every line of his face expressed a fixed purpose, to be achieved at any and every cost.

As he entered the room where Heldt and his family were seated at supper and took his place at the table, the others felt the change in him, without comprehending it. Milly kept her eyes on her plate. Mrs. Heldt regarded him with half-frightened glances as she filled and passed his cup. The two boys stared stolidly at him. Heldt himself, the lowest of the group in the scale of intelligence, regarded him with a senile leer, at the same time winking furtively at his wife.

Denning had nothing to say, but he ate with a keener relish than for days. After supper, he lighted

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his pipe and going into the woods behind the house, gave himself to plans for the immediate future.

Meanwhile, Heldt shuffled across the room to where his wife sat.

"He's comin' 'round all right," he announced with a low chuckle. "He's one o' them high-spirited colts that don't stiddy down all to wunst, but I never see the one yit that I couldn't break," and the old man wagged his grizzled head confidently.

"I reckon when you think you've got this 'ere one broke, he'll up and kick the traces," his wife responded sceptically.

"Kickin' won't do no good now, and he knows it ef he's got good horse sense. I tell ye, he'll settle down all right."

When Denning knocked the ashes from his pipe, preparatory to going in the house, his plans for the next few weeks were definitely laid. He would sign and mail the contract the following day. The survey lacked but a few days of completion. For obvious reasons, he wished to make his stay in New York, prior to his departure for South America, as brief as possible. He therefore decided to remain where he was while arranging his notes of survey in proper shape and preparing his final report. This would require some two or three weeks' additional work. By that time, he would be ready to return to New York and prepare for the South American trip, the date for which, as stipulated in the contract, was on or before November fifteenth. Having disposed of these details to his satisfaction, he entered the house and going to his room, locked himself in, lighted the lamp and sat down to the preparation of his notes.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Hollingshead's next letter added new fire to Denning's already enkindled ambitions. When not engrossed in his work, he was absorbed in schemes that would have surprised the more conservative Hollingshead. As the general, in his tent, plans the manœuvres of the coming battle, so Denning, in his humble chamber, mapped out his future business career. Naturally, his thoughts were pleasant ones, and unconsciously to himself, they lent a pleasanter tone to his manners. This improvement, Heldt complacently attributed to the "settlin' down" process, though his wife remained sceptical; but Milly felt instinctively that in Denning's cool, quiet civility, he was farther removed from her than in his anger.

The last day of Denning's sojourn in the mountains arrived; one of those extraordinarily beautiful November days that presage the coming of winter,—a "weather-breeder" Heldt termed it. So quietly had he made his preparations for leaving, they had aroused neither question nor suspicion. His surveying outfit, notes and reports he had expressed to Hollingshead. There remained only a grip, into which he could hastily pack the few belongings still scattered about his room. His final act, the preceding day, while in the nearest town on business, had been to deposit in the bank the sum of twenty-five hundred dollars, to the credit of Millicent Denning. He had paused and looked at the name after writing it. It struck him unpleasantly. He did not begrudge her the money, but he did the name. He would gladly have doubled the amount of the deposit, if only it could have been made in the name of Millicent Heldt.

But on this last day, his spirits rose exultingly. A

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letter from Hollingshead, received that morning, already anticipating their departure, whetted his own impatient desire to be gone. He wrote a few letters—among them, one to Milly, which he intended mailing just before taking the train—then, as time hung heavily on his hands, he proposed a stroll, to which Milly, with a look of faint surprise, assented. They followed the familiar path up the mountain and seated themselves in the little clearing where they had sat on that October afternoon, a few weeks before. They remarked the change in the woods and on the mountains since that time ; they noted the low-lying clouds along the western horizon—harbingers of coming storm—but gradually Milly grew *distracte*, answering in monosyllables, with eyes that wandered absently, till Denning, too, became silent. She sat beside him, her hands clasped about her knees, gazing dreamily into the distance. With the cessation of his voice, she seemed to have forgotten him, to be unaware of his presence, and he fell to studying her curiously, the aversion he had felt for her of late held in abeyance for the moment.

He was struck by the peculiar expression of her face, a sort of half-awed wonder, as though she were face to face with some mystery beyond her comprehension. There was a brooding look in the dark, limpid eyes, that grew slowly luminous with a strange, tender light which gradually irradiated the plain face with something like beauty. Denning drew in his breath quickly—he had never seen her look like that—with a half movement toward her ; but, quicker than it came, the light was gone. The gesture, slight as it was, had roused her, though she did not realize

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

its import. She turned toward him questioningly and, with a swift revulsion of feeling, he rose abruptly and began the descent homeward, while she followed silently.

The few remaining hours dragged interminably ; but at last, his grip packed, Denning awaited in his room, the coming of the team that was to convey him to the nearest town in season for the midnight train for New York. As he sat by the open window, looking down the narrow, winding road that lost itself in the semi-darkness, he mentally reviewed the situation. He would have preferred leaving openly, but he had a man's dread of a "scene," and chose this method of departure as, all things considered, the more expedient.

But whatever slight scruple he may have felt as to his manner of leaving, he had absolutely none regarding the act itself. To attempt to identify himself with the life and conditions around him was inconceivable. To introduce one born and bred under those conditions into the world in which he moved, would be equally out of the question. The course he had adopted was the only one possible under the circumstances ; there was simply no other alternative.

Concerning Milly herself, he felt no compunction. He had given her what she would consider a fortune, in addition to a name that was, to him, beyond price. He had done all that a man could do.

Sleep had descended on the household, while, outside, the long threatened storm was gathering. Dark clouds covered the western sky, creeping slowly upward, while the pale light of the rising moon, at times partially obscured, added a weird effect to the scene. Near the horizon the lightning played fitfully ; the air

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grew oppressive and intermittent puffs of wind flared the lamp burning dimly in his room, then suddenly extinguished it.

Denning rose and cautiously made his way downstairs. He reflected that the team was nearly due ; he would wait outside, or perhaps walk down the road to meet it. He found the outside door ajar, and as he swung it noiselessly open, he saw Milly standing in the low porch, with face uplifted, watching the clouds. Her back was toward him ; she had neither heard nor seen him. Surprise held him motionless for a moment. Then the thought occurred to him that it was better so, and he stepped quickly forth, closing the door behind him. She turned, but he was the first to speak.

“What are you doing here?”

“I came out to watch the storm. There’s going to be a thunderstorm and that means that winter’ll set in, right away. I shouldn’t be surprised if this winds up in a snow-storm to-morrow or next day.”

The clouds fascinated her ; she no more than glanced at Denning, evidently attributing his presence there to the same motive as her own. He was wondering how best to begin what he must say, when she suddenly turned, noting for the first time the grip in his hand and the rain-coat thrown across his arm.

“Why, what—where are you going?” she stammered. “You surely ain’t starting for town this time o’night !”

“Yes, I’m going to town.”

“But how are you going to make it, so late, and a storm coming up, too?”

“I expect a team to come for me in a few minutes.”

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

“A team!” She looked at him in bewilderment; but a dim comprehension was dawning in eyes and voice. Denning put down the grip and came nearer.

“I am going away, Milly, but it’s for the best, for both of us; for you as well as——”

“You’re going back to—to where you came from—to New York?” she interrupted falteringly.

“Yes.”

“And—you don’t mean to come back?”

“I am not coming back.”

Even in the uncertain light, he saw her face suddenly grow pale, while one hand involuntarily clutched the wooden railing behind her, but there was neither word nor sound. She stared dumbly, seeming incapable of speech. He felt baffled, irritated. He was prepared for remonstrance, reproaches, pleadings, perhaps; anything but this stony silence.

“Don’t you understand, Milly,” he demanded impatiently, “that separation is the only course for us? That it’s best for both of us?”

“I reckon ’twon’t be any worse than the last month has been,” she answered apathetically.

“That’s just it,” he responded eagerly; “You can see for yourself, by the past month’s experience, that there’s no use in our attempting to keep up this way of living. There can be no happiness between two people unsuited to each other—as we are.”

He stopped, suddenly aware that she did not hear him. She had partially turned from him, and as the moon lighted for a moment the fast deepening darkness, he saw on her face the same strange expression it had worn in the afternoon, on the mountain side. As he ceased speaking, however, she leaned towards

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him, with lips parted and breath indrawn, as though about to speak ; yet remained silent, looking searchingly into his face.

He felt the need of haste to say what must yet be said.

“It has been wretched business, Milly, for both of us, from beginning to end. I want you to forget it all and I have tried to make it as easy for you as I could. I have put some money in the bank for you ; it is yours, your own, to use as you please.”

He spoke the last words with emphasis, fearing she had not heard them, and her reply showed she had not.

“You say you want me to forget it all ; is that what you’re going to do ?”

“Heaven knows I hope so !” he exclaimed ; “I am going to forget all this foolishness and settle down to a different sort of life, the kind of life I was intended for.”

“Then,” she clasped her hands tightly and there was a slight tremor in her voice, “then if you are going to forget this—this foolishness, as you call it—you wouldn’t want anything that would—would make you remember it, would you ?”

“That would remind me of it? No !”

“You are sure ?” she queried, with strange insistence.

“Of course I am. I never want to think of it again,” he replied, almost brutally.

To his surprise, a look of relief crossed her face, and she drew herself up with a little gesture of womanly dignity altogether new. He could understand neither the movement nor the expression.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

"I am glad you take it so sensibly," he said, after a pause in which he had waited for her to speak ; "Forget me ; forget this whole affair. You can get a divorce on the ground of desertion, you know ; and I hope that by and by, you will marry some one who will make you happy."

The pale, spectral light had been swallowed up in the fast gathering blackness. He could not see her face, but there was that in her voice that made him fancy a smile was on her lips, as she replied gently :

"You don't know much about me to talk like that ! I ain't one of the kind that forgets."

Above the roar of the oncoming storm, Denning caught the sound of hoof-beats coming up the road.

"The team is coming, I must go !" he said, hastily slipping on his rain-coat and picking up his grip ; "Good by, Milly. I would rather you did forget ; it would be better for us both."

"You needn't be afraid," she answered steadily, out of the darkness, and her voice had the same quality as before ; "I shan't ever do anything you'll need to be ashamed of !"

A flash of lightning gave him a parting glimpse of her as he turned to leave. She stood erect against the storm, heeding neither wind nor rain ; her childish form, revealed through the scant, wind-tossed garments, invested with new dignity ; her dark eyes lighting her pale face, and—a smile on the parted lips, just as he had imagined.

IV

CONCERNING A PRODIGAL SON

WHEN Denning and Hollingshead left for South America, the latter had fixed five years as the limit of their stay in that country, but twice five years passed before their return. An important factor, which Hollingshead had not taken into consideration, but which speedily forced itself upon his observation, was the change—mysterious as it was marvellous—in Denning. A shrewd, tactful, dominant man of business had taken the place of the devil-may-care youth whom Hollingshead and his set had known. Who or what had wrought the sudden metamorphosis, seemed, however, likely to remain a mystery, since Denning himself became strangely taciturn whenever the subject was broached.

It had been the younger man who, from the beginning, had assumed charge of the business in hand; evincing such ability both to plan and to execute, and carrying forward the enterprise on a scale so far exceeding the ideas of the slower going Hollingshead, that the latter soon found himself occupying a secondary position. This state of affairs he accepted urbanely and at the expiration of the ten years, was still good-naturedly wondering at the transposition by which he and Denning had changed places.

On their last night out, on their return trip, they were seated on deck, each absorbed in his own reflec-

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tions ; but even the most casual observer would have surmised a wide difference in the trend of their thoughts.

Denning lay back in his chair, his hands clasped firmly beneath his head ; with cap pulled low over the half-closed eyes fixed with such persistent but unseeing gaze on the scarcely distinguishable line where sea and sky met. His lips were tightly compressed about the unlighted cigar which he turned and twisted between his teeth with a sort of savage restlessness.

Hollingshead lounged negligently, nearby ; his attention divided between his cigar, which he smoked with a cool, deliberate enjoyment, and a letter lying open upon his knee. From time to time, his glance wandered, half-smilingly, to his companion's face ; then, meeting no recognition, roved indifferently over sky and sea and returned to the letter.

At last, becoming restive under the long silence, he kicked Denning playfully.

"I say, Mac, old man !"

"Well ?"

" 'Well' !" mocked Hollingshead, "Suppose you drop your eternal figuring and calculating for a while, and concentrate your attention on something outside of dollars and cents."

Denning glanced at his friend with a tolerant smile, as he proceeded to light his cigar.

"Something is weighing on your mind, Dick. Out with it !"

Business life had developed in Denning a habit of speaking directly to the point, with as little circumlocution as possible. His few remaining English idioms

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seldom betrayed themselves, except on some rare occasion of conviviality among his own countrymen.

His cigar lighted, he assumed an attitude of attention, while Hollingshead read the letter—containing an invitation from the club they had oftenest frequented to a reunion to be held in honor of their return, by such of the former kindred spirits as still remained—and unfolded a number of projects, for the diversion of themselves and their friends, upon their arrival.

Denning listened, but an undercurrent of thought flowed on uninterruptedly, in the same channel as before ; one which Hollingshead little suspected.

In a foreign country, amid unfamiliar scenes, absorbed in business, Denning had found the task of “forgetting,” to which he had set himself, easier than he expected. What had seemed an irremediable mistake, likely to overshadow the remainder of his life, came to be scarcely a memory ; something recalled only in rarely reminiscent moments, or sometimes in the silence of the night. But on this return voyage, foremost among the old memories which, revived, crowded upon his mind demanding recognition, was the image of the simple-hearted child of the mountains whom, he had flattered himself, he had forgotten. There was no touch of sentiment in the recollection of her ; nothing but repugnance. But scorn her memory as he might, he could not banish the thought that, in all probability, she yet lived, perhaps still bearing his name, and each league was bringing them nearer. It was insufferable ! Why had he not insisted, that night, upon a divorce—laid his commands upon her ? Not that he had any wish ever to marry—no more such folly as that for him !—

CONCERNING A PRODIGAL SON

but what would he not give to know for a certainty that he was free from her ; that she was divorced, or,——

“I say, Mac, you know, it’s awfully clever of the boys to think of us and we’ll show them we haven’t forgotten the ropes ! We can jolly well afford it, by Jove ! and we’ll——”

“Do whatever you like, Dick, of course, but don’t count on me,” Denning interposed. “You will have to make my excuses to the boys, as I shall remain in New York only a few hours——”

“The deuce you say !”

“Just long enough to arrange matters with the company and get my banking attended to,” Denning concluded calmly.

“And then, what do you propose ?”

“I shall take the first train West.”

“West !” Hollingshead repeated blankly, “Where to ? Chicago ?”

“I shall not stop in Chicago more than a day or so.” Denning paused and with great deliberation tapped the ashes from his cigar ; “I’m going out among the mines, to look about a bit.”

“Well, I’ll be—damned !”

A silence followed, in which Hollingshead puffed violently at his cigar, while Denning relapsed into abstraction.

“I say, Mac ; when did this thing occur to you ?”

“I’ve had it vaguely in mind for some time,” Denning answered evasively, “but it didn’t come to anything definite till within the last day or so.”

Hollingshead groaned : “Might have known it ! Such a fit of abstraction as you’ve had the last twelve

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hours could mean nothing else than that your brain was incubating some new scheme ! But why can't you use some moderation, Mac ? You always carry things to extremes ; you did in the old days, you know, and you do now in money making. After working as we have for ten years, what's the sense of starting right in again on the same old grind ? ”

“ You are at liberty, Dick, to amuse yourself as you choose, but I insist on a like privilege of choice myself.”

“ Oh, choice be—hanged ! A fellow has a right to express an opinion, hasn't he ? If you want to amuse yourself nosing around underground, you're welcome to. I'm jolly well done with the business.”

“ Not so far done with it either, but ~~that~~ you'll follow me, if I wire you.”

“ You want to wager anything on that ? ”

“ Yes ; anything you like.”

Hollingshead glanced curiously at Denning, but the face of the latter was inscrutable.

“ Whatever put the West into your head, Mac ? ” he asked, after a pause ; “ Isn't New York big enough for your operations ? ”

“ New York doesn't offer the kind of chances I want,” Denning answered shortly. He blew a long, thin column of smoke into the air and watched it waver, diffuse itself and disappear.

“ Do you remember, Dick, taking me on one of your Western trips when I first came to the States ? Well, I wasn't doing much in those days except sowing my wild oats, but it struck me even then that there was the country for a man with lots of capital, common-sense and experience—it would take all

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three, every time—to get the quickest kind of return on his investment. Now, I've got the capital and the experience, and a grain or two of common-sense, and I'm going to put my theory to the test."

"Well," returned Hollingshead disgustedly, "all I have to say is, that if you haven't any aspiration beyond money-grubbing, I don't see why you ever left South America."

Denning tossed his cigar over the deck-rail with an impatient movement.

"I was going to comment on your aspirations, Dick, but I guess it's unnecessary."

"By Jove! I haven't degenerated into a mere machine, a mathematical automaton for computing interest and percentages. I believe in relaxation, in social intercourse; it expands the mind and broadens one's views and——"

"I remember it frequently expanded my head, but my views were usually rather befuddled," Denning retorted, with a laugh. "Hollingshead, old fellow, if I hadn't any higher aspiration than a club dinner now and then, with a lot of asses, I wouldn't consider life worth living!"

"You used to think them deucedly clever fellows——"

"Yes, same as I used to think you had some common-sense! They were clever enough that they could give me all the help I required to squander one fortune, and they're still clever enough to be all agape, ready to help squander another. Hollingshead, you blooming old idiot, how much notice do you suppose they would have taken of our return if we had come back dead broke?"

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Denning paused a moment. Hollingshead moved uneasily in his chair, but said nothing.

"Because we haven't, they are simply waiting to do the grand hold-up act, and you, like the good-natured simpleton you are, will esteem it an honor to be held up! What did any one of them ever do for me after I had spent my money on them? You were the only one of the lot to stand by me, and it's out of pure gratitude that I'm standing by you now, in your approaching senility and imbecility."

"Thanks, awfully!" Hollingshead muttered; then tossing away his cigar, he rose and began pacing up and down in front of Denning.

"'Pon my word, though, Mac, how you've changed from those days! Nobody then would have thought you'd ever be the cynical, avaricious, old money-grubber that you are!"

Denning had risen and seated himself on the deck-rail, and was looking moodily out over the dark waters.

"A woman-hater, too!" Hollingshead continued; "Could there have been anything more improbable! Usually," he added slowly, with a shrewd glance at the broad shoulders so persistently turned toward him, "usually, you know, there's a woman in the case. I've sometimes fancied, Mac, that 'La Petite,' as we used to call her, figured in this one of yours, though I'd no idea at the time that you were so—well, so jolly hard hit, don't you know."

"Hollingshead, you're an ass!"

Denning turned, with a short laugh, as he spoke, and paced a few steps on the deck.

"A fellow can't go on eternally sowing wild oats,

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and heaven knows, I put in a good-sized crop as it was ! It was simply the old story of the Prodigal Son, with some slight modifications—modernized, so to speak. Like him, when I had wasted my substance in riotous living, I came to myself—in other words, saw myself for the blithering idiot I was. The main difference lay in the fact that I didn't go back to the pater, but stuck it out and made another fortune."

"Yes, stuck it out with the swine and the devils, by Jove !" supplemented the other feelingly.

"The 'devils'? Why, what are you talking about?"

"Why, the Prodigal Son, of course. He was feeding swine, wasn't he? Well, didn't the devils pitch the whole herd of 'em into the sea, so that he lost his job?"

"I'm afraid you're not 'up' in Scripture, Dick. It strikes me you've got that mixed. If there was any such sequel, I don't recall it."

"H'm ! I thought that was where the hard times came in, that reminded him of the roast beef and plum pudding at home, you know."

Silence followed. Denning's gaze roved restlessly across the waters, seeing, however, only a wistful, half-pathetic face with dark eyes strangely alight and lips that parted in a faint, inscrutable smile, as the lightning had revealed it on that night, long ago.

He started, with an impatient movement ; "Gad ! I don't know what's the matter with me to-night ! I'm going down to get a whiskey and soda. It was nothing but reversion to type, Dick, the change you spoke of. There comes a time when what is born and bred in a man has got to come out. You never knew my

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people, Dick ; but my father and grandfather—and my great-grandfathers before them—have been among England's leading business men ; men who were mighty forces in the world of finance. You insinuated, a while ago, that I had no aspiration beyond money-getting. If I were a clod like you, with no aspiration—or ambition, to me, the words are synonymous—beyond having a good time as I went along, I suppose some of my opinions might be as imbecile as yours, but I think I would at least keep them to myself. But my money-grubbing, as you call it, is all for a purpose, and mark my words, Hollingshead, when that purpose is achieved—as it must and will be—I will stand in the financial world of America where my father stands to-day in the financial world of Great Britain.”

“Good for you, Mac, old man ! Go in and win, with my blessing ; and when you've won, your idiotic and impecunious friend will know where to go for a loan, if his finances happen to be at ebb tide.”

“No, no loan to you would go, Dick ; I wouldn't lend you a cent ! But you can always have whatever you want and welcome, and you know it. Well, I see you're going in for another smoke, so good-night.”

A cigar did not seem to satisfy, so Hollingshead pulled out his pipe, and after filling and lighting it, puffed abstractedly for the next three-quarters of an hour. As he replaced it in his pocket, he muttered :

“As I thought, a woman in the case, but who ? It must have been ‘La Petite,’—there was no one else—but I wouldn't have believed it, by Jove !”

V

THE SKELETON AT THE FEAST

BUSINESS detained Denning in New York longer than he anticipated and it was not until the evening of the third day that he finally found himself aboard the Western Express. Body and brain were nearly exhausted with weariness, but before retiring for the night, he went into the smoker and withdrawing as far as possible from the other occupants, gave himself up to his cigar and reflection. Not until that moment had he known how wearied he was, and not until a half hour later, as he listened abstractedly to the rhythmic pulsations of the mighty mechanism, throbbing with an almost sentient life, did he become distinctly conscious of a sense of relief, deepening into an intense satisfaction, as he realized that each revolution of the wheels was speeding him farther and farther from scenes which had evoked only unpleasant memories.

As he recalled the three days since his landing, he seemed like a man awakening from a nightmare against which he has been futilely struggling. He could scarcely account now for the vague, haunting fear which had taken and held possession of him on his return; the dread of some question or comment, some unlooked for event, some sudden, unwelcome recognition, which might betray his secret—or, at least,

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its existence—and which had led him to avoid his old associates, and even to covertly scan the faces of the hurrying, thronging crowds. Perhaps he had been morbidly sensitive; it seemed so, now that the incubus was lifted and he could again breathe easily. He had committed no crime, that he should feel like a fugitive with a price upon his head; only an indiscretion—common enough, heaven knows!—for which he had made abundant reparation. Ah! how the thought of that stung, even yet! That wretched mesalliance! What if he had met *her*! What would she be like now! What sort of a life might she be living? Perhaps still bearing his name! He writhed inwardly. God! what would he not give to be free.

A sudden lurch of the train roused Denning from his reverie. He discovered his cigar out and himself alone. He rang for a whiskey and soda; then, returning to the sleeper, made his way between the oddly bulging curtains—the rocking of the train bringing him in collision with various portions of the human anatomy, which sometimes elicited responses brief and to the point—to his own berth, where, for hours he lay planning as usual for the future.

Meanwhile, at the club reunion, Hollingshead was presenting Denning's excuses, but in a style peculiar to himself.

No, Denning really couldn't come. Deuced sorry, you know, but called away at the last minute; sent his regrets and all that sort of thing. Yes, had to leave the city on business; saw him off on the seventhirty. Going West, you know. Got a big mining deal on hand out there, besides two or three railroads he's negotiating for, some options to be looked after,

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and no end of smaller schemes too numerous to mention. Busy? Well, rather! Greatest business man you ever saw; financier right from the word "go." The B. & W.? Oh, yes, they simply took him right into the bosom of the family, so to speak! Made him general manager at the end of two years; and in less than five years, director, with a controlling interest, and his choice of three marriageable daughters. Yes, sir; damned if the president himself didn't come down there and throw 'em all at his head! I don't know but he could have had all three of 'em if he'd wanted. I'd jolly well like to see two or three heiresses thrown *my* way; I'd pick 'em up fast as they came! Mac? Never turned a hair, by Jove! Confirmed bachelor, you know, the most rabid sort, regular woman-hater! Yes, Mac's a queer fellow. What's that? "La Petite?" Oh, you remember that, do you? Yes, I've sometimes thought—What? Really? Got a divorce, has she? Well, well! I must tell Mac of that. But mark what I say, boys; Mac's going to make a record, all right! He's after something—I don't know just what—and he'll get it, by Jove! He's got the American go-at-it-tiveness, don't you know, backed by the good old English, bull-dog stick-to-it-tiveness, and that's a combination damned hard to beat!

Six weeks later, when Hollingshead, in response to a telegram from Denning, rejoined the latter at the mining town of Shasta, he discovered his own fanciful enumeration of the other's financial interests to be not so much of an exaggeration, after all.

Denning met him at the station, in corduroys and

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leather leggings, with soft slouch hat tipped rakishly to one side, bespattered with mud from top to toe. Hollingshead stared, for Denning was still fastidious in dress, one of the old-time traits which yet remained. The steel-blue eyes of the latter lighted with something like his former boyish mirth.

"Well, old mutton-chops, how are you? My wire brought you all right, didn't it?"

"I say, Mac, my boy, 'pon my word, I didn't know you! Have you taken to drink, or what's the matter?"

Denning laughed: "You'll soon find out what's the matter if you don't get down to business! Here, let me take some of that luggage; there is plenty of room for it under the back seat."

He led the way to a double-seated runabout, behind a pair of slim-bodied, western-bred horses, the entire outfit more mud-spattered than himself.

"I say, old leather stockings, is this real estate for sale?"

Denning paused and lifted an inquiring glance from his task of packing away the luggage. Hollingshead pointed to the mud.

"How much is it a square foot, you know?"

The packing was resumed with vigor and a single emphatic expletive sounded from out the depths under the rear seat.

Once fairly started on their way, Denning unfolded his plans.

"You see, Dick, the reason I sent such urgent wire, it's an almighty big proposition, and the whole thing hangs on your decision."

"What's the figures, Mac?"

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“The price of the mine is seventy-five thousand; fifty down, the balance in six months.”

Hollingshead looked puzzled: “But, I thought you said——”

“That is the price of the mine, understand. If I buy it, however, I shall put about seventy-five thousand dollars’ worth of improvements on the property—a new mill, machinery, and so on. I shall get control of a railroad lying to the west of the property—a branch of the N. W.—and build a spur of my own to meet it. There is a lot of good land lying idle just where this spur will join the other line; I shall buy that up, stake it off into town lots and start a town there at the junction, for our base of supplies, that, in less than five years, will make lively competition for Shasta.”

Hollingshead’s perplexity increased: “All this expenditure on a seventy-five thousand dollar mine? Profits will be rather slow, won’t they?”

“Not if the mine is what I think it is, and that’s what I want you to decide. You remember the Penvallon, don’t you, Dick; the one you reported on years ago, at the time I came out with you?”

“Jove! yes; turned out to be one of the greatest producers in the country, just as I said it would.”

“Well unless I’m greatly mistaken, the Bonnibel is on the same vein as the Penvallon.”

“The deuce, you say!”

“Your description of that mine made quite an impression on me at the time. I remembered some of the peculiar characteristics you mentioned, and I was struck by the same characteristics in the report given me of the Bonnibel. I knew it was comparatively near

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the Penvallon, so I got one of the experts out here and we investigated, with the result that we are both confident the Bonnibel is practically on the same vein. The owners say they have a good thing, but that it is rather inaccessible and transportation charges over the G. & B. are enormous and they haven't the capital to work it. But we discovered that they have, in reality, lost the original lead—on account of a peculiar dip—and the probabilities are they haven't any idea how good a thing they have got."

"And your idea of building a spur to connect with the other line is to reduce transportation charges?"

"Partly that. I'll kill several birds with one stone. A number of mine owners in the vicinity will ship over my line if I build, and a little competition will be a good thing for the G. & B. They've had a monopoly too long."

"Yes, and it's your way of doing business, to buy the earth—if you can—and run it to suit yourself."

A few days later, the two were seated in a small room in the log building which did duty as office on the mining property. On the pine table between them was a large plat of the mine, showing the underground workings, on which Hollingshead had just traced the course followed in his examination. Beside the plat were an assayer's report and some specimens of ore. Hollingshead sat with arms folded on the table, watching Denning with a curious half-smile. The latter, though silent and almost motionless, was more excited than the other had ever seen him. His face was tense and rigid with his efforts to control his feelings, but the swelling veins in forehead and neck and his slowly rising color told the tale. His eyes

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followed the tracing to the end, then were lifted to Hollingshead's face, shining with excitement, but keen, cold as steel itself.

"You are sure, Hollingshead?"

There was such an implied weight of finality in his tone that Hollingshead involuntarily paused, before replying.

"Damned sure!"

This was his most emphatic form of asseveration.

Denning's only response was to take out his check-book and write out a check—his hand trembling slightly as he signed it—which he silently tossed toward Hollingshead. Nothing had been said regarding his remuneration, but Denning knew his usual rates and a casual glance at it as it lay on the table, showed Hollingshead that he had doubled the amount. He understood his chum too well, however, to make any comment.

"Much obliged, old man," he said, picking it up and slipping it within his vest pocket with elaborate carelessness.

A short silence followed, broken by Hollingshead.

"I congratulate you, Mac!"

"Hold on a minute, Dick; there's Pete. I want to speak to him."

He sprang to his feet and going to the door, ordered the horses and runabout.

"Let's go to town, Dick," he exclaimed as he again faced his companion; "Gad! I can't stay up here to-night, on top of this news! I've got to work it off some way."

"But it's nearly five o'clock, old man,——"

"Can't help that. It's down-hill; we'll make it in

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about four hours. Come on ; we'll have the best to be had in the town, and what is lacking in quality we'll make up in quantity."

"Are Conley and Blatchford going to be in on this?" Hollingshead inquired slyly, as they started down the trail. Conley and Blatchford were the present owners of the Bonnibel.

Denning laughed : "Not to-night, my boy, not to-night ! After the papers are drawn and signed, I'll give them the royalest treat of their lives, but this is our own little celebration on the *qt.*"

It was as Denning had surmised. The vein of the Bonnibel was identical with that of the Penvallon, only—and this was what had staggered him—wider and richer.

The sun had set ; the steep trail had been left behind and they were riding over the foot-hills in the twilight, the town, seemingly, almost within a stone's throw, when Hollingshead said slowly, after a long silence :

"Mac, my boy, that mine would be cheap at quarter of a million."

Denning did not reply at once ; when he did, it was with measured deliberation :

"Well, I shall expend fully half a million before I have done what I intend doing ; but,"—he added with emphasis—"I shall get it back again—several times over."

It was nine o'clock when they reached the hotel in Shasta which they usually frequented, but Denning ordered dinner to be served in his room. At midnight they were still seated at the table, lingering over the champagne and cigars. Hollingshead, suf-

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ficiently under the influence of the former to be unusually talkative, was recounting his recent "outing" with "the boys" while in New York.

Opposite him was Denning—his face flushed, his eyes unnaturally bright—intoxicated, but not with wine. Apparently listening, his thoughts rolled on, not calmly and steadily in their usual channel, but in a wild flood, a torrent; surging, rioting through his brain and quickening his pulses, as he peered into the vista which this new turn of affairs opened up to him through the coming years, till he could scarcely restrain the cry of exultation that arose within him.

"One more round!" he cried, raising his glass, "Here's to the Bonnibel!"

"Here's to the new owner of the Bonnibel, his health and prosperity!" Hollingshead responded before Denning had finished speaking; then having drunk his toast, he refilled his glass.

"I say, Mac; to make this thing complete, we ought to include some of the fair sex in our toasts to-night. Who shall it be? Some one of your old flames, or all of 'em together? Their name would be 'Legion,' wouldn't it?"

Denning was not often profane, but on this occasion he was so excited as to be scarcely himself. His face darkened. Hollingshead's words angered him; on this night of all nights he wanted no allusion to the past.

"Damn the women! What do you want to drag their name into this thing for?"

The other laughed, too much absorbed in his recollections to note that he had touched the wrong chord.

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"That puts me in mind, Mac, of a bit of gossip I heard the other night at the club that surprised me ; a divorce, you know ; one that I think you'll be interested in."

Denning did not start, but the blood surging through his veins seemed suddenly to have congealed. He put his glass down with peculiar deliberateness. He did not know that every vestige of color had left his face, or that his eyes were fixed, staring blindly at the glass still in Hollingshead's hand. He only knew that Hollingshead had ceased speaking and he was waiting, what seemed an eternity, for him to continue.

"Mac, old boy," Hollingshead exclaimed in genuine alarm, "what's the matter? You look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

With an effort, Denning raised his eyes to meet Hollingshead's, looking into them unflinchingly, but with the expression—it seemed to the latter—of a man waiting to hear the verdict, "guilty" or "not guilty."

"There is nothing the matter," he replied calmly, "Why don't you go on? Though I don't know why you should think it would interest me."

Hollingshead was conscious of the awkwardness of the situation.

"It was only a joke, you know," he said, half apologetically. "And I thought you'd be interested, too, in a way. Mrs. Archie Forbes—'La Petite,' you know,—has secured a divorce from Forbes."

If Hollingshead had been frightened at the first change in Denning, he was terrified at what he now saw.

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With the sudden reaction, the blood rushed back to Denning's face until it was of an apoplectic hue. Disappointment,—for, mingled with other emotions, had been a faint hope of news of release—chagrin, mortification, but dominating all, rage,—at himself for having betrayed himself; at Hollingshead, for having brought it about,—were written on his face, with its deepening purple tint, while he sat apparently unable to speak or move.

Hollingshead half rose from his chair: “Mac, for God's sake——”

A gesture from Denning silenced him.

After some moments had passed, Denning rose and took several turns about the room, stopping at last by his chair, opposite Hollingshead, who involuntarily rose to his feet.

“I think you may as well retire, Hollingshead;” Denning spoke calmly; “Neither of us is quite himself to-night, but I'll see you in the morning and we'll have the necessary papers drawn at once for the property. Good-night, Dick.”

“Good-night, Mac.”

Hollingshead left the room, muttering under his breath, “Plucky as ever!”

He knew Denning well enough to know that neither explanation nor apology would ever be offered or allowed. The incident was simply closed, was, except for the memory each would retain, as though it had not been.

VI

NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS

THE town which Denning projected along with the opening of the railroad and the development of the mine, sprang into being as though by magic. With the news of the rich strike on the Bonuibel vein and of the new railroad communication, men flocked by the hundreds into the hitherto inaccessible district. New claims were staked out, abandoned claims were relocated, and valuable properties which had lain idle for want of transportation facilities again became active.

Denning's Junction, as it was first called—rechristened Henley when it attained the dignity of a post-office—formed the connecting link between these various camps and the outside world. It was the distributing point for their supplies, the shipping point for their ore and bullion. Within three years from the staking out of its town lots, it had a municipal government, a complete water system, a street railway and two banks.

Of the banks, one was a private institution recently organized by Denning himself. It had been inaugurated as a savings bank, ostensibly for the benefit of the miners; but, in reality, as the initiatory step towards the next stage in his own business career, to which he was now directing his energies. To him,

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his successes, already achieved, were merely preliminaries to other and greater achievements; the means to an end ever uppermost in his mind. His business associates had come to regard him as a man of almost unlimited ambition, but no one knew to what end it tended, or what the goal might be which he had set himself to win. That was his secret of the future, which he guarded almost as jealously as that other secret of the past. Not even to Hollingshead, who was still the only one admitted to any degree of intimacy, had he ever said anything more definite regarding past or future than his words on deck, that night before their landing in New York.

Hollingshead was, if anything, more conservative, more easy-going, than ever; too indolent to bring his abilities into full play, content to take whatever good the gods might bestow, rather than exert himself for the acquisition of greater good. But the more widely diverse the two men became in their habits and mode of life, the stronger seemed to grow the subtle bond that drew them each to the other. Most of his leisure time Hollingshead spent in the mountains, near Denning, and by close observation coupled with a shrewd judgment and supplemented by a sort of intuition born of their intimacy, he had come to certain conclusions of his own regarding his friend, which he, in his turn, guarded as his secret.

When not in Henley, or at the camp, Hollingshead was usually to be found at Hampton Springs, a small mountain resort near by, which had been brought into considerable prominence with the renewal of traffic over the railroad. Here also, Denning had financial interests, being one of the stockholders of

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the new summer hotel and club house at the Springs, to which he not infrequently came himself for a few hours of relaxation.

The second season of the hotel had just opened. It was yet too early for many of the society contingent to arrive, but a little group, gradually gaining in numbers, gathered every evening on the wide veranda and gossiped with the unconventional freedom which usually abounds in such places.

Towards this group Hollingshead sauntered negligently one evening, having just come over from Henley after a few days' absence. He looked the company over indifferently, nodding to one or two as he passed, till his glance was arrested by a pair of laughing eyes, and their owner exclaimed :

“Here is Mr. Hollingshead ; he can settle it for us !”

He turned and slowly approached the speaker, who was seated a little apart from the others, on a small settee, a diminutive King Charles spaniel beside her. She was well formed and well gowned, and she knew it. Hollingshead stood before her, silent for an instant, regarding her with his slow, quizzical smile, behind which lurked the admiration which she understood as well as though it had been expressed in words.

“Good evening, Mrs. Durant. May I inquire what it was that you wished settled ?”

“Settled ? Oh, yes.” She recalled herself with a light laugh ; then, before replying, drew her skirts away from the settee with a charming little gesture of invitation, at the same time smiling at him reassuringly. She possessed such an abundance of a not unpleasant sort of assurance, that it invariably dif-

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fused itself on all with whom she came in contact. As Hollingshead took the proffered seat, the spaniel barked.

“Psyche, dear, be quiet! It was only the spring water I wanted settled, Mr. Hollingshead; that is, not the water, but the ingredients—isn’t that the word? Mr. Bates and I were telling a newcomer about it and we got into a dispute over those dreadful names—the minerals in it, you know,—and I thought you, being a mineralogist, would know all about it.”

Hollingshead looked preternaturally grave: “Not without an analysis of the water, Mrs. Durant.”

“Really, can’t you? I supposed you could tell it off-hand like a piece of ore. But it doesn’t matter, they are interested in something else, now. Psyche, what are you doing? Come here.”

“She doesn’t annoy me in the least, but what is the jolly little beast after, anyway?”

“Oh, sweetmeats, of course. She thinks all pockets were made expressly to hold sweets for her.”

“After sweets, is she? A feminine instinct! I’ll be better prepared for her ladyship next time.”

Meanwhile, Psyche, having abandoned her search for candy, had stretched herself comfortably upon Hollingshead’s lap, and now glanced over her shoulder at her mistress with a look of supine complacency.

Mrs. Durant laughed: “The absurd little wretch! Did you see that? She is extremely fond of gentlemen’s society. I suppose”—she added a trifle defiantly, as she again caught the quizzical gleam in the other’s eyes—“I suppose you will say that is feminine instinct, also.”

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“Not since you have been kind enough to say it for me.” Then, after the least pause.

“Did I understand you to say there had been some new arrivals?”

“Oh, yes; a number. Several gentlemen; one of them, a Mr. Richards—that gray-headed man talking with Mr. Bates—seems quite a character. Made a fortune here in the early days, you know, and lives in New York now, but comes out here every few years when he gets, what he calls ‘downright lonesome.’ Just fancy that! Oh, yes, and there was a lady among the arrivals to-day—quite a party in fact—and so very distinguished looking! Oh, she isn’t visible now; really, no one has seen her since she first came; they must have had dinner in their apartments. I understand they have one of the most expensive suites——”

“They? Beg pardon, who? You were speaking of a lady, were you not?”

“Didn’t I say she had a party with her? How very dense!—Psyche, dearest, stop tearing my handkerchief!—Yes, an elderly lady, her mother, I presume; a child—such a lovely little creature!—and a maid. She is a Mrs. Wynne, from Cleveland—Oh, yes,” as she noticed a slight elevation of Hollingshead’s eyebrows—“I went over and looked at the register just as soon as she had gone upstairs. I was simply dying to know something about her, her appearance was so out of the ordinary, you know. The other woman is a Mrs. Taylor, from somewhere in Iowa. She appears to be very much of an invalid and is evidently the excuse for coming here.”

“Do people have to have an excuse for coming here?”

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"They all have one—haven't you ever noticed?—some good and sufficient reason to account for their being here; all but you and me, we haven't a shadow of excuse, either of us."

"I am here for my health," Hollingshead answered, with a sidelong glance.

She laughed mockingly: "Mr. Bates, did you hear that? Mr. Hollingshead says he is here for his health! Would you have fancied it?"

"Well," responded Bates, a twinkle in his eye, "it's a little difficult to tell just what he is here for,"—there was a general laugh, as Hollingshead's indolence was the subject of considerable jovial comment;—"But that has rather a broad significance out here."

"It generally signifies," added another, "that one's own section of country has got to be particularly unhealthy for him, for some reason."

"How is that, Hollingshead?" Bates asked laughingly.

Before he could reply, the newcomer, whom Mrs. Durant had mentioned, was speaking:

"I guess, from all I hear, you've got one man out here that didn't come for his health, and that's this Denning there's so much talk about. Over there at Henley, as near as I can make out, he's made the town and runs it, and they tell me that since he took hold of the Bonnibel mine, it has knocked the Pen-vallon's record silly. Why, I remember that mine. Conley and Blatchford thought they had a bonanza when they first struck it, but it didn't pan out as they expected and for years they were trying to unload it. The last I heard of it, a tenderfoot, fresh from the

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East, had bought it, and Conley was chuckling that he'd sold the mine and him too."

Shouts of laughter stopped the recital at this point.

"By George! that was what we all thought!" said Bates.

"Denning a 'tenderfoot'! Oh Lord!" groaned another, "Did you fellows ever get left?"

"Yes, that was once when the boot was on the other leg."

"So this is the same fellow? Well, I swear!" ejaculated Mr. Richards; "I'd give a good deal to see that man and congratulate him on getting ahead of all you fellows!"

"I guess Hollingshead here could manage that for you," said Bates; "Mr. Richards, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Denning's expert, Mr. Hollingshead. There's the man," he added, as they shook hands, "that experted the Penvallon years ago, and experted the Bonnibel for Mr. Denning."

Before the group dispersed, Hollingshead had agreed to pilot Mr. Richards through the Bonnibel mine and introduce him to Mr. Denning.

Mrs. Durant had been a most interested listener to the talk regarding Denning and his successes, and later in the evening, having exhausted every other source of information, she waylaid Hollingshead in one of the corridors.

"Do tell me about your Mr. Denning, this wonderful man! Is he visible nowhere but at the mine, and can no one see him except they have a permit from you?"

He smiled: "Do you wish to see him, Mrs. Durant?"

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His directness disconcerted her for a moment : “ I ? I am simply dying to see what he is like, after all I have heard of him. Very wealthy, isn’t he ? ”

“ He is considered so, I believe. ”

“ And they say he has built such nice houses—sanitary and all that sort of thing, you know—for the working-men in Henley, and given the site for a public library, besides opening a savings bank for his miners. A sort of philanthropist, isn’t he ? ”

“ If he is, I think he would be the last one to admit it, ” Hollingshead replied, with tremendous gravity.

“ Yes ? ” A faint suspicion flitted through Mrs. Durant’s brain that a shadow of a smile lurked somewhere in that solemn face, but the corridor was dimly lighted ; she was not sure.

“ Well, modesty is certainly commendable, ” she added tentatively. “ I understand he is a bachelor, but, is it true, as they say, that he—er—doesn’t like women ? ”

“ Well, really, Mrs. Durant, I am not in his confidence in such matters, but so far as I can judge, I should say Mr. Denning seems to occupy rather a neutral position as regards women in general. He is so absorbed in business, I doubt if they ever occur to him. ”

“ How dreadful ! If he were only a woman-hater he would be so much more interesting ! Well, it’s Psyche’s bedtime and I must go upstairs. Good-night, Mr. Hollingshead. Do try and arrange some way for me to meet Mr. Denning ; for, I’ll tell you frankly, I don’t believe a thing of all you’ve just said to me about him. Your words all had that hollow ring of insincerity, don’t you know ! and I want to see him and judge for myself. ”

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Hollingshead bowed low : “ You shall meet Mr. Denning, Mrs. Durant, and if your own judgment doesn’t confirm what I’ve said to you to-night, Psyche shall have two pounds of bon-bons.”

“ Agreed !” she answered, laughing, “ It’s a go, only don’t you forget !” and a few moments later, with Psyche in her arms, she waved her hand to him from the gallery on the next floor.

VII

THE "RICHARDS EPISODE"

DENNING had three offices between which he divided his time with the systematic precision which characterized all his business methods. The one which he designated as his town office had been established contemporaneously with the staking out of the first town lots in Henley and had advanced with the growth of the town. It had originally consisted of a small "shack," containing a second-hand desk, a pine table, a box stove and some chairs. It now embraced a suite of rooms on the second floor of the Denning Savings Bank building and was equipped with the most modern office furnishings.

To this office, Denning devoted his forenoons from eight to twelve, with the exception of two mornings each week which were spent at the mine, inspecting the works and going over the reports and statements awaiting him in his office there. At one o'clock, he went to the bank and stayed till four, when he returned to the rooms on the second floor, where he remained until six and was often to be found late into the night.

Hollingshead came upon him in his mining office the morning following his interview with Mr. Richards at the hotel.

"Hello, Mac, old man! Is this your 'busy day'?"

"Oh, no; not 'busy', simply a rush of work, that's all. Anything I can do for you, Dick?"

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“Nothing ; only I’ve got a party out here that I’m taking around, an old fellow that has made a few millions in mines himself. The show won’t be complete, you know, unless he sees you, and I’ve promised to go him the whole figure. Can you give him about ten minutes ?”

“Can’t spare a minute this morning, Dick. Bring him around to the bank this afternoon.”

“All right. So long, old man !”

Hollingshead knew his chum so well that in bringing a stranger to the office, it was his invariable custom to make an engagement with him within a limited time, to prevent the call from becoming too protracted.

Accordingly, as he approached the bank that afternoon in company with Mr. Richards, he suddenly exclaimed :

“I say, Mr. Richards, have you seen that collection of ores on exhibition down here at the First National, —from some of the British Columbia mines, you know ?”

“British Columbia, did you say ? No. Why, I’m interested in B. C. mines myself. Where did you say they were ?”

“At the First National, two blocks further down. Let me see”—looking at his watch—“it’s two-fifteen ; the banks close in three-quarters of an hour. I’ll give you about fifteen minutes with Mr. Denning ; then I’ll call for you and we’ll go down there and take a look at them.”

They found Denning in his banking office—the office with “President” on the door, a small room, but similar in its arrangement and appointments to that other

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bank president's office in the old English town, impressed indelibly upon Denning's memory.

Denning greeted Mr. Richards courteously, but with that incisive manner with which Hollingshead was so familiar, which said plainly as words that time was money and he could not afford to waste it. Hollingshead excused himself and withdrew with his usual formula on such occasions.

"I'll see you later, Mr. Richards."

After a few congratulatory remarks, Mr. Richards repeated his story of the preceding evening.

Denning's face relaxed: "Yes," he said, smiling, "I had an impression at the time that Conley and Blatchford thought they were doing me up, and I was particularly careful not to disabuse them of that idea."

"Well, I said last night that I wanted to congratulate the man that got ahead of those fellows. You wasn't what they took you for, but I came out here some thirty years ago, as genuine a tenderfoot as ever landed in these parts, and they did me up, *brown*. I pretty near got even with 'em afterwards, but it always does me good when I hear of their getting left, and I know Conley has kicked himself black and blue over this deal on the Bonnibel."

"You were originally from the East, then? from New York?" Denning asked indifferently.

"From the East, yes, but from Pennsylvania. I was born and raised in Alton, a little town near one of the greatest coal mines in the State, though we wasn't thinking of coal in those days."

Alton! What memories that name recalled! Mr. Richards rambled on, while Denning, scarcely listening, saw again the dingy office of the justice of the

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peace, stifling with foul air and tobacco smoke ; the justice himself, shabby, slovenly, inflated with self-importance. He heard again the words of the civil marriage form and felt the little cold, trembling hand shrinkingly placed within his own.

"Yes, I lived in that little town till I was past twenty-five, and then I took old Horace Greeley's advice, and came West."

Denning's polite indifference had vanished. He was alert, thinking rapidly, though outwardly calm and cool as before.

"You must have been pretty well acquainted in that part of the country."

"Acquainted ? There wasn't a man, horse nor dog within twenty-five miles that I didn't know."

Denning glanced about him. Clerks were passing and repassing the door and he was liable to interruption at any moment. He opened a drawer in his desk and took therefrom a box of cigars.

"Have a cigar, Mr. Richards—no, pardon me, these are not what I thought they were. Just come upstairs to my private office, I have a particularly fine brand up there."

As they passed the cashier's window, Denning said, "I'm going upstairs, Gordon. If any one inquires for me, I'm engaged."

To his stenographer, he said, "Admit no one—except, of course, Hollingshead ; if he comes around, all right ; otherwise, I am engaged."

Comfortably seated in Denning's private office, with a fine cigar, all thought of British Columbia ores vanished from Mr. Richards' mind. They suddenly recurred to Hollingshead, however, as he stood watch-

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ing an illicit but fascinating game of roulette behind closed doors, in the rear of a popular cigar store. He glanced at his watch. It lacked fourteen minutes of three! Two minutes later he arrived, at the Savings Bank, perspiring and breathless, and rushed into the president's office before any one could stop him. While he stood gazing blankly about him the cashier appeared at the door.

"Mr. Denning is upstairs, Mr. Hollingshead."

"Oh, yes, much obliged; but where is Mr. Richards, the gentleman who came in with me, you know?"

"He is with Mr. Denning; they are both upstairs."

"Not in his private office!"

"Yes, sir; Mr. Denning left word that he would be engaged."

"The deuce, you say!"

Outside, in the corridor, Hollingshead mopped his brow reflectively while waiting for the elevator.

"Gad! It can't be his long-lost father turned up! Must be the old fellow has a mine to sell,—or a bank; I believe Mac would buy a bank or two if he could!"

Meanwhile, from mines and mining in general, Denning had drawn his guest to speak of the coal mines in his native state.

"Are you familiar with that large mine near Alton, or haven't you been in that part of the country lately?"

"Yes, I go back there every few years. My father lived there till within the last five years—lived to be over ninety—and I've got a brother there now. Yes, I know that mine about as well as anybody, I guess." And he launched forth into details.

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Following a light knock, the door opened and Hollingshead, at a nod from Denning, entered. He said nothing, however, as the latter seemed deeply interested in the description of some coal mine, and picking up a newspaper, he withdrew to another part of the room.

"I suppose the town has grown since the mine was opened up," said Denning, when the other paused; "I was there a good many years ago, about the time of the discovery of coal in that region, but Alton was only a village at that time."

"That so? Then you know something of the country 'round there. Yes, Alton is a pretty sizable town now, and she hasn't got her growth yet. Acquainted in those parts?"

"No. I was there only a short time on business. But it's curious how people and places will be associated in one's mind sometimes. As soon as you spoke of Alton, I recalled an old man I used to see around there; he came from somewhere out in the country, Heldt, I think was the name."

"Old man Heldt?" exclaimed the other laughing, "Did you know him?"

"I knew of him. He struck me as such an eccentric character that I made some inquiries about him."

"Yes, he was a queer character. Dutch descent, but somehow he always put me in mind of some of those mountaineers in the South; lazy and shiftless, about as near 'poor white trash' as you'd ever see in Pennsylvania."

"I suppose he and the old horse go back and forth the same as ever?"

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Mr. Richards shook his head: "No, they're all gone; not hide nor hair of any of the outfit left."

"Moved away?"

"No, cleaned out. Seven years ago, the fever was uncommon bad through the mountains there—good many fatal cases—and it wiped old man Heldt and his family off the earth."

Denning felt a thrill like an electric shock, and for an instant the beating of his pulses sounded in his ears like the muffled roll of a distant drum. He glanced at Hollingshead; he was absorbed in his paper.

"Do you mean they all died? If I remember, he had a number of children; two or three sons and—er—a daughter, wasn't there?"

"There was two sons; I don't know anything about the women folks."

"I am sure I remember a young girl that used to come to town with them," Denning supplemented hastily.

"Well, it might be—one more or less don't make any difference. I know father said the whole houseful was cleaned out in less than six weeks."

"Yes, that's the way back there among that class of people; unsanitary conditions, you know; bad water, or something of the sort." Denning had fully recovered himself. "There's a fever prevails out here among the mountains, every year, but I've taken great pains to have the houses built according to the latest sanitary regulations and we haven't had a case of fever in the town yet. Hollingshead, have you taken Mr. Richards about town?"

Hollingshead understood the signal and came forward. They all chatted pleasantly, but within five

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minutes, Mr. Richards was somehow impressed that it was time to take leave.

"Well, sir," he said, as he shook hands with Denning, "I'm glad to have seen you. You're not like some of these business men nowadays that haven't time for anything more than 'How d'ye do'? and 'Good day'. I've had a mighty pleasant call and one of the finest cigars I ever came across, and if you come 'round to see me some time when you're in New York, I'll try to have some as fine for you."

"Thank you; take another," laughed Denning who was cordiality itself. "Very glad to have met you, Mr. Richards. I'll be pleased to have you look me up whenever you come West."

"I will that; you may depend on it."

As the door closed upon Mr. Richards and Hollingshead, Denning returned to his desk with a subtle sense of exhilaration that set his nerves tingling and thrilling, his pulses throbbing. It seemed to him that a new man filled Macavoy Denning's place, a man for whom neither past nor future held any shadow of dread or fear. He felt emancipated! And now that the fetters had dropped from him, he realized as never before how they had galled and chafed!

He recalled the last thirteen years of his life. He had succeeded beyond even his hopes, but what men had called his ambition had been, in part, the goading of a sort of desperation that had driven him like a slave to his work and kept him there. Now, he could work as a free man, simply for the joy of working and winning.

He recalled another phase of his life, the social side. Outside of his business relations, he had lived almost

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as a recluse, shunning social intercourse, even among his own sex. He realized too well the verdict which would have been pronounced against him had the facts been known ;—even now, he inwardly recoiled as Mr. Richards' contemptuous phrase "poor white trash" recurred to him—and too proud to occupy a false position, he had virtually ostracized himself. Now, he felt, as a disfranchised man to whom the rights of citizenship had been restored might feel, that he could once more meet the men of his own class on an equal footing and look into their eyes with level glances.

In his opinion—with which the world, his world, would have coincided—all the disgrace and obloquy lay in the fact of his marriage, *per se*, and Death had mercifully wiped that out. Death was generally to be dreaded, of course, but he did his work with finality and he told no tales.

His thoughts leaped forward into the future, brighter now, than ever ;—but a knock arrested his attention, and he was compelled to defer that outlook till another time.

That day marked another epoch in Denning's life.

VIII

A NEW DEPARTURE

ON the morning following his interview with Mr. Richards, though Denning rose at his accustomed hour and plunged as usual into the daily routine, it was, nevertheless, to him the opening of a new life and his thoughts naturally tended towards the maturing of new plans for the future which, for some time, he had had in mind. He felt a buoyancy he had not known in years. His step rang through the corridor on the way to his office with an unwonted elasticity, and there was a quality in the tone of his "Good morning" which made his stenographer pause in her work for a second look at his face. He worked that day with new energy, but not with his old dogged persistence. Several times he stopped to taste anew the sweets of the strange sense of freedom which he felt and to project into the future plans more far-reaching than any heretofore thought of.

Hollingshead observed him closely, but without question or comment. Entering Denning's private office on the second day, he found him whistling as he he sorted the papers on his desk.

"I say, old man; this is Saturday, you know. Shut up shop this afternoon and go with me over to the Springs."

Denning folded a typewritten document and slipped a rubber band over it before replying.

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"All right, Dick. I really intended going over there this afternoon. The Springs seems to be about the only thing available around here in the way of diversion. I wish there was a decent theatre within twenty-five miles," he continued, "I think I would enjoy a good play to-day. If I thought I could make it pay, I would build an opera house in Henley, but I'm afraid the place wouldn't support a first-class house and I wouldn't have any other."

"I suppose if you did, that would be added to the list of your benevolent and philanthropic works," Hollingshead retorted with a laugh; "you seem to have acquired a reputation for that sort of thing. Some one inquired only the other day if you were not a philanthropist."

Denning gave a little snort of derision: "Must have been some young fool reporter—or else a woman!"

"It was a woman, and for that reason I had to use considerable diplomacy in order to maintain my own reputation for veracity without dimming the lustre of yours for philanthropy."

"I haven't a doubt but that you were equal to the occasion."

"Thanks, old man. I told her you would be the last one to admit it; so that, of course, drives the nail through and clinches it on the other side, besides adding modesty to your other virtues. Pretty clever, wasn't it? It's up to you now to maintain the reputation I've established for you."

"Some one has said," remarked Denning reflectively, "that there are two classes of people to be dreaded: enemies, with the worst of intentions; and friends, with the best. I don't know in which cate-

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gory to place you, Dick, but if I could see your fair interlocutor, I would warn her that modesty is not one of *your* virtues."

"It's easy to see, then, in which category you belong ; and you'll soon have the coveted opportunity to undermine my reputation, for I've promised her the pleasure of meeting you."

A caller was here announced and their conference ended.

"I'll meet you at the station, Mac ; what train?" said Hollingshead, turning to leave the room.

"Make it three-thirty, Dick."

The hotel and club house at Hampton Springs faced each other from opposite sides of a broad avenue leading direct from the station. There was, that afternoon, an unusual number of guests from the surrounding towns assembled for the morrow's holiday. Among the group of fashionably attired women on the hotel veranda, Mrs. Durant occupied a place well in the foreground, overlooking the avenue ; while conspicuous amid the stream of arrivals from the four o'clock train, were Denning and Hollingshead. The latter lifted his hat in response to a flutter of Mrs. Durant's handkerchief.

"That, I presume, is the goddess to whom I am to be immolated in order to propitiate her favor for yourself," said Denning mockingly, at the same time joining in the salute.

"That is Mrs. Durant, to whom you are to be presented. Isn't she a stunner?"

"I am not prepared to say at this distance ; can tell better after the presentation. I am going over to the club now, Dick ; see you at dinner."

A NEW DEPARTURE

“By Jove! I wonder if he’s going to flunk the introduction,” Hollingshead muttered, looking after Denning as he crossed the avenue; “deuced awkward for me if he does!”

A few minutes later, Mrs. Durant, with Psyche in her arms, was greeting him effusively.

“Oh, Mr. Hollingshead, it is an age since you were here! We have missed you so much, Psyche and I; so delighted to see you back!”

“The pleasure is mutual, I assure you, Mrs. Durant,” and Hollingshead bowed over a well shaped and much bejewelled hand.

“You must let me introduce you to the ladies, those who have come recently, you know. I have told them about you and they are all so anxious to meet you.”

Hollingshead was presented to a score of ladies, matrons and maids, some of the latter being quite young, hardly more than school-girls they seemed to him, but with all the assurance, as he afterwards told Denning, “of old campaigners.”

Mrs. Durant had a way of introducing a gentleman to her friends as though she were magnanimously bestowing him upon them, individually and collectively, “to have and to hold, forever”; and of immediately thereafter appropriating him to herself in a *tête-à-tête* from which all were so manifestly excluded that no one had the temerity to intrude. Accordingly, Hollingshead speedily found himself upon a settee in an angle of the veranda formed by a projecting window, with Mrs. Durant beside him and Psyche ensconced upon his lap.

“I have told Psyche, Mr. Hollingshead, of the box

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of bon-bons you are to bring her, which probably accounts for her devotion to you to-day."

"Really! Is she so essentially feminine as that?"
"Mrs. Durant tapped his arm with her fan; "You dreadful man! We ought both of us to ostracise you for such insinuations," she protested, but with her most reassuring smile.

"But Mrs. Durant, you should not raise Psyche's expectations, or encourage her to indulge in false hopes. Her mistress has not yet won the bon-bons."

"Oh, but I shall; I am confident of it. I am sure you misrepresented Mr. Denning. I have found that he is one of the most delightful men in the world."

"What a charming discovery! When did you meet him?"

"Oh, I haven't had that pleasure yet—Psyche, dear, get down; you must not annoy Mr. Hollingshead—but Mr. Richards, when he came back from Henley, couldn't talk of anything else but the delightful reception he had from Mr. Denning. And then, Mrs. Gordon,—the wife of the cashier of Mr. Denning's bank, you know, and one of my dearest friends,—Mrs. Gordon says she has met Mr. Denning often in his banking office, and she thinks he is a perfect dear; so courteous and refined, with that indescribable English air, don't you know. When are you going to bring him over to the Springs, Mr. Hollingshead?"

"Well, really, you know, Mrs. Durant, I don't know that I could 'bring' him at all. Mr. Denning is one who comes when he is ready, and not before."

"Dear me, what a pity!"

Hollingshead, feeling a little uncertain regarding

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Denning's intentions, resolved to turn the conversation into a safer, and to him, more interesting, channel.

"Is the Mrs. Wynne whom you mentioned the other day, still here, Mrs. Durant? I didn't hear her name among those of the ladies I just met, and I'm a bit curious to see her, you know, after what you said of her."

In Mrs. Durant's opinion, Hollingshead's query showed a most decided want of tact, and she resolved to punish him accordingly.

"Mrs. Wynne?" she answered with polite indifference, "Oh, yes, she is still here, but she is so absorbed in that invalid aunt of hers—she is an aunt, not her mother, as I conjectured—that one scarcely sees her except at meals. By the way, Mr. Hollingshead, I wanted to inquire who that gentleman was who came up the avenue with you. He was so very distinguished looking, you know; only I can't say that I admire his taste in preferring the club to the hotel with all its present attractions," and she smiled archly at Hollingshead.

He returned the smile with one of genuine amusement.

"That was Mr. Denning, Mrs. Durant."

"Mr. Denning!" she ejaculated. In her surprise, she nearly shrieked, and Psyche, convinced that something out of the ordinary had happened, barked excitedly, to the very evident amusement of the onlookers.

When Psyche had been pacified, Hollingshead assured Mrs. Durant that he would use his best endeavors to bring about a speedy meeting between herself and Mr. Denning, and soon thereafter made

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his excuses and walked away with his feelings unaccountably ruffled.

Meanwhile, at the club house, Denning had met a number of business acquaintances. Gordon, the cashier, was there; as was also the president of Henley's First National Bank; two or three mining men, among them, Benham, the owner of the Pen-vallon, and with him a guest by the name of Rigby, from one of the coast cities. Denning was asked to join them in a friendly talk and smoke. He accepted, ordered wine for the party and proved so entertaining a talker that when he finally excused himself and left the room, one of the men remarked:

"By George! I never took Denning for that sort. Always thought he was one of your stiff, reserved fellows, but he can be sociable when he wants to be."

"Denning's all right; a damned good fellow!" added Benham, that being the highest encomium he could bestow.

"I should like to know him better," said Rigby. "We want men of that type in the town I come from."

Denning smiled to himself as he left the elevator and walked slowly down the corridor to his own apartments. He was still smiling when, a few minutes later, he seated himself before an open window to enjoy the luxury of an hour of uninterrupted quiet and seclusion.

He had just accomplished one of his little strokes of finesse on which he prided himself and which constituted the secret of many of his business successes. He knew Rigby by reputation. He wished to meet him and had come to the Springs for that purpose.

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His courtesies, to which all had been welcome, had been, in reality, for Rigby. He had exerted himself to entertain—Rigby, and he had attained his object. Denning knew that as surely as the morrow dawned, Rigby would seek him out for further acquaintance. He had, that afternoon, laid the foundation for his next financial venture. Henley had been little more to him than an experiment, to prove to himself—and incidentally to others—the practicability or impracticability of his plans. It had been, *per se*, an unqualified success ; but a test merely opens the way for larger work. Henley could not hold him much longer.

A box of cigars stood beside him on a table, but he drew from its case his favorite pipe, to which he always resorted when an important decision hung in the balance, and having filled and lighted it, lay back comfortably, with feet extended on the low window casing, prepared to take a long, deep look into the future, the aspect of which had, within the last few days, changed so materially.

For nearly an hour he smoked and deliberated. By that time, he had as he believed, outlined the career of a successful financier and man of the world from the age of thirty-five or six, upward ; a man of ability and wealth, just entering upon the prime and vigor of life ; a man possessing that power over men and women that would insure him success in whatever arena he chose to enter, financial, social or political.

Women, however, had small place in his plans. The thought of marriage seemed repugnant. Perhaps, when he should have entered the political lists and won the crowning victory of his life, which he now

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saw in the golden distance—that of an honored statesmanship—a wife, worthy of the name and position he could give her, might then, by her own grace and beauty, throw an additional lustre about the glory of his achievements. But until some such time, his present mode of life suited him very well.

The future which his imagination painted for him must have been a pleasing one, for he looked well content when Hollingshead found him a little later.

“I say, old man; you’re not going to flunk that introduction, are you? Mrs. Durant is getting a little too obvious for that, don’t you know.”

“Mrs. Durant, eh? Well, it strikes me, Dick, that you are rather too willing to share Mrs. Durant’s favor.”

“It strikes me,” responded the other rather grumpily, “that about the only use Mrs. Durant has for me at present is as a decoy for larger game.”

“Oh, that’s the way the wind blows, is it?” Denning laughed. “Isn’t it about time for dinner, Dick?”

“By Jove! yes, and thirty minutes past.”

The dining room when they entered was well filled. The incessant hum of voices and the clatter of dishes announced that dinner was already well under way, while the commingling blues, pinks, heliotropes and greens of evening gowns, in all their varying and delicate tints, relieved here and there by pure white, formed a delightful medley in color.

Hollingshead bowed and smiled to his recent acquaintances, but Denning passed down the room with his usual indifferent air, looking neither to the right nor left, yet closely observant. When they took the chairs the obsequious waiter drew out for them, Den-

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ning knew far better than Hollingshead each table and its occupants.

“Who is the lady in black, with the dark red rose?” he inquired when the waiter had departed with their orders.

“A lady in black?” queried Hollingshead, “I didn’t see her ; where is she ?”

“At the same table with your Mrs. Durant.”

“The deuce, you say ! How do you know which is Mrs. Durant ?”

“By her smile, my boy ! It was flung out as a beacon light to guide us up the avenue this afternoon, and to-night, it out-dazzles even her diamonds. ‘My lady of the Red, Red Rose’ could not have selected a better foil.”

Hollingshead turned slowly, his eyes resting, for an instant, on Mrs. Durant. She was resplendent in pink silk and diamonds, the latter, as she smiled and bowed, scintillating and coruscating as though in the spirit of rivalry which Denning had suggested. His glance travelled across the table, where, seated opposite Mrs. Durant, was a woman whose supple, perfectly rounded form had yet a hint of slenderness. Her face, oval in contour, was of a creamy, ivory tint ; absolutely devoid of color except for the vivid scarlet of her lips. He could not see her eyes, but her brows were straight and well defined, and from a low, broad forehead the dark brown hair rippled in glorious, natural waves to a loose, graceful knot at the nape of her neck. Her gown was black,—of a soft, clinging material which accentuated the perfect symmetry of her form, yet shimmered here and there with a silken sheen—without jewel or ornament, save for a superb

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red rose which lay on her breast. Her face was slightly averted, but the poise of the head, the exquisite curves of cheek and neck, were faultless. She seemed more like some rare portrait in ivory than like a living woman.

With a swift intake of his breath, Hollingshead gazed at her without speaking.

"By Jove! Isn't she a peach?" he finally exclaimed, his eyes seeking Denning's.

"Blood and breeding will tell every time, and there you have them," the latter answered with the cool indifference of the connoisseur; "she will score more fine points than any other woman in the room."

"'Pon my soul, Mac, one would think you were speaking of a horse!" Hollingshead retorted, with a shade of impatience.

"No use getting hot about it," returned the other imperturbably, "I believe the animal of the genus homo is subject to most of the same general laws as the other animals."

Without deigning to reply, Hollingshead again directed his attention to the lady in black, but, to his evident discomfiture, encountered a pair of dark eyes, brilliant but cold, and which grew perceptibly colder as they read the undisguised admiration in his glance. As Hollingshead withdrew his eyes, he caught an unmistakable smile of amusement on Mrs. Durant's face, and red and embarrassed, turned to find Denning enjoying the situation.

"'Did you ever get left?'" hummed the latter, under his breath.

More than once during dinner, Hollingshead glanced curiously at Denning. He was reminded of that night

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in Shasta, more than three years before, when Denning's excitement over the news of the Bonnibel's undiscovered wealth had rendered him not quite himself. His face was flushed and his eyes were unusually bright to-night, and there was an unnatural gayety in his manner, all betokening, as Hollingshead well knew, some new business success which Denning had not seen fit to divulge.

After dinner, Denning found himself one of the centres of attraction, his business acquaintances hastening to introduce him to their wives and daughters. At an opportune moment, Hollingshead presented him to Mrs. Durant, who, a little later, succeeded in drawing him into the inevitable *tête-à-tête* in one of the hotel parlors.

Half an hour afterward, Hollingshead, passing a window near them, was amused at what he saw. Mrs. Durant's face was in the shadow; he could not catch its expression. But Denning wore a mask of impassivity which Hollingshead imagined would tax her penetrative faculties to their utmost; while at their feet was Psyche, alert, watchful, but preserving an attitude of strict neutrality towards the new-comer, with no show of hostility, or overture of friendliness.

Hollingshead turned away with a smile, but also with a half troubled consciousness that he, too, had been of late rather shut out from Denning's confidence.

IX

AN UNLOOKED FOR EVENT

SUNDAY differed from the ordinary day at the Springs, being a general holiday. Each one breakfasted according to his individual inclination, and some did not breakfast at all. Dinner was served from one to two-thirty, an arrangement by which all who so desired could attend the base-ball game which opened at three, in an open space designated on the posters as "Hampton Park," about a quarter of a mile from the hotel. After the game, or from six to seven-thirty, "supper" was served.

Denning, who occupied his suite of rooms at the club, was awakened at ten by the elevator boy, who informed him that Mr. Rigby would like an appointment with Mr. Denning at any hour convenient to the latter. After consulting his watch, Denning named eleven-thirty, if agreeable to Mr. Rigby. He then took his bath, visited the tonsorial artist in the lower regions of the club house where the Sunday law regarding that line of art was skilfully evaded, after which he ordered breakfast served in his apartments. He entered his reception room by a rear door as the genius of the elevator conducted Mr. Rigby to the hall door.

Mr. Rigby would no doubt have been greatly astonished could he have been told that his visit was the

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result of, and a part of, a preconceived plan of Denning's, and anticipated by the latter. To himself, it was simply the outcome of a thought which had occurred to him the preceding day while listening to Denning's conversation ; and the man seated opposite him in immaculate white duck—cool, nonchalant, urbane,—was, of course, unconscious of the object upon which he had come ; as unconscious as he looked to be of the sudden heat that glowed and palpitated that morning in the blinding glare of the alkaline sand outside.

About an hour later, Hollingshead, also in white duck, strolled leisurely over to the club house from the hotel.

"Mr. Denning's apartments," he said, stepping into the elevator.

"Mistah Denning's engaged, sah," said the Genius, without quitting his seat.

"Engaged, you black monkey ! What do you mean ? Is he in bed, or in his tub ?"

"He ain't in no tub, sah ; he's in his pahloh wid a gem'man what made a 'pointment wid him befo' he's up."

"The deuce, you say ! I guess he'll see me ; take me up."

"I tell you, sah, he won't see nobody ; dem's his pacific instructions, sah."

This was said with an air of finality which precluded further argument and Hollingshead turned on his heel.

"You go to—Hades !" he muttered.

"See yoh dar yohse'f fust, boss !" retorted the Genius, under his breath.

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In no very pleasant mood, Hollingshead sauntered aimlessly back to the hotel. The veranda was practically deserted, but as he entered the broad hall between the office and a little waiting room, he was suddenly confronted by a small, wriggling, leaping object which sprang upon him with an utter disregard for white duck. Fortunately for Psyche, her mistress emerged from a side door, or she would have met with an ungracious reception.

"Good morning, Mr. Hollingshead ; isn't this positively dreadful? I am nearly prostrated by this terrible heat, coming so suddenly, too, you know !"

"Beastly !" he growled ; "Don't feel jolly fit myself, this morning."

She sank upon a divan close at hand in the hall and he, not knowing what else to do, dropped with an explosive sort of a sigh into a large wicker chair standing near, where he sat moodily silent.

"I didn't see you or Mr. Denning at breakfast. How is he feeling after last night's gayety ?"

"I haven't seen Mr. Denning this morning." The recollection of his recent interview with the Genius imparted a certain degree of acerbity to his reply.

A brief silence followed, in which Mrs. Durant wondered whether a coolness had arisen between the two men and, woman-like, began to speculate regarding its cause.

Meanwhile Hollingshead had discovered certain dusty imprints—the marks of Psyche's affection—upon his duck trousers, which fact did not tend to mollify his already perturbed spirit. He glared savagely at the offending spots, then began a vigorous application of his handkerchief.

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"Did Psyche do that? What a shame! Psyche, you naughty!"

"Oh, it's no consequence," he replied, quite red in the face, presumably from his exertions, "she is simply rather over-demonstrative don't you know, like most of her sex."

Perhaps the remark was intended simply as a safety-valve for his pent-up emotions. At any rate, it relieved his feelings and the spots having entirely disappeared, he speedily grew more amiable. Glancing at Mrs. Durant, he read in her face her huge enjoyment of the situation.

"The little beastie's all right," he said half-apologetically; "she means well, don't you know."

"Like most of her sex," supplemented Mrs. Durant.

"Oh, I say," he protested, "there's no need to rub it in."

"Don't be so sweeping in your remarks next time. I can assure you, Mr. Hollingshead, that the lady you were so interested in at dinner last evening will never be guilty of over-demonstrativeness."

"Then she must be one of the exceptions that go to prove the rule," he answered, laughing. "Who was she?"

"Incorrigible! You don't deserve to be told. That was Mrs. Wynne. Would you like to be presented?"

"One good turn deserves another, I believe."

"I wonder," Mrs. Durant looked rather pointedly at Hollingshead, "I wonder whether Mrs. Wynne, when you meet her, will fulfil your expectations."

"I wonder," he replied, returning her look, "whether Mr. Denning fulfilled yours?"

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She laughed. "I don't know that I had any definite expectations. He is not at all what gossip and report—or even your own words—might have led me to expect. He must exhibit different phases to different people, so that no two get the same view. Interesting, isn't it, to be able to do so?"

"What was your view?" he asked, smiling at what he considered her whimsicality.

"Oh, he turned the perfectly opaque side to me, while those keen eyes of his looked me through and through, as though I had been made of glass."

He failed to detect the irony in her words and remarked complacently :

"Yes, Mr. Denning has remarkable penetration and a certain amount of reserve. I sometimes think that is half the secret of his wonderful success."

"And the other half?" she asked, smiling.

"Oh, I suppose a number of traits combined," he replied indifferently, "his ambition, and so forth."

"And his egoism," she added softly.

"Egoism!" he exclaimed, "Why do you say that, Mrs. Durant?"

"Because, with all due respect for Mr. Denning, it is his dominant characteristic. He is the most sublime egoist I ever met. His self-love amounts to a perfect passion, to the exclusion of every other. The one thing that seems inconsistent with the man himself, is the line along which his egoism manifests itself."

"And that is—what?"

"Self-glorification, instead of self-gratification," she replied with an enigmatical smile.

Then noting a shade of annoyance on his face,

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she rose and picking up the somnolent Psyche, said laughingly :

"I see you think I am traducing your friend and it is dinner time, but if, after a better acquaintance with Mr. Denning than you seem to possess yet, your judgment doesn't confirm what I've said to you this morning, *you* shall have two pounds of bon-bons."

"Oh, I say ! but you took me rather by surprise, don't you know. And about the bon-bons, Psyche shall have them all right. But I wish you would explain that last remark of yours about Mr. Denning."

"Not now, Mr. Hollingshead ; I'm famished. Besides, it will explain itself as you become better acquainted with Mr. Denning."

"I flatter myself I know Mr. Denning now better than any one else," he replied half-resentfully.

"I haven't a doubt of it," she answered, and seemed about to make a laughing response, but changed her mind and added with a gentle seriousness, wholly new to her, "there may be depths, you know, that even you have not sounded."

After waiting nearly an hour for Denning, Hollingshead went in to dinner alone. He had reached the fourth course and the dining room was practically deserted when Denning entered with a stranger whom he introduced as Mr. Rigby. Hollingshead was annoyed at having a third party forced upon him when he wished to see Denning alone. Mr. Rigby, finding his friend's friend rather uncommunicative, naturally addressed himself to Denning, while Hollingshead finished his dinner in silence. After dinner, it transpired that Mr. Rigby could not attend the ball game, as he

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was to take the afternoon train for Shasta. Denning, therefore, out of courtesy to his guest, was obliged to decline Hollingshead's invitation, and the latter, with two tickets in his pocket and wrath in his heart, set forth alone for Hampton Park, notwithstanding the many appealing feminine glances cast in his direction.

A few hours later, Denning, having seen Mr. Rigby aboard the train for Shasta, was walking up and down the platform of the little station. His train for Henley was due in half an hour, and he preferred waiting at the station, alone with his reflections, to going back to the club house or hotel. He wanted to be alone, to think over the events of the day, to exult in its achievements. That day represented to him the best work of his life thus far. He had come to the Springs with a definite purpose, and he had accomplished it.

Rigby's name had long been familiar to Denning. More than two years before, while Henley was yet in its infancy, two of the leading banks, in one of the larger cities along the coast, had suspended payment within two weeks of each other. A panic had followed and Rigby had been the man sent out by the comptroller to bring order out of this chaos. He was appointed receiver for both banks and he had executed his trust with exceptional ability and fidelity. The affairs of the insolvent banks were now nearly adjusted and it had been rumored that in the near future, a new bank was to be organized, designed to be one of the leading institutions of its kind in the North West ; and the personnel of its officials and directors was known to rest mainly in Rigby's hands.

For the last few weeks, Denning had been planning a trip to the coast, which should include, among other

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business projects, an interview with Mr. Rigby. The day following Mr. Richards' call, however, he had seen by the papers that Mr. Rigby was making a flying visit to Shasta and would spend the succeeding Sunday at Hampton Springs; and he had laid his plans accordingly. They had succeeded even beyond his anticipations, and as he walked up and down before the little station, it was with the consciousness that when, seven months later, on the first of January, the North Western Bank of Rockland should open its doors to the public, he, Thomas Macavoy Denning, would be its president.

Much remained to be done in the coming seven months. Already he was planning the disposal of his present interests to suit the new conditions.

Shouts and cheers, distant but coming nearer, broke in upon his thoughts. The ball game was over. Busses and carryalls, filled with players and spectators, were driving rapidly toward the station, where the two teams were to take the train for their respective homes. Denning was not particularly interested in the score, or the fine points of the game, noisily shouted from mouth to mouth, and he passed around to the rear of the station where he continued his plans, till warned by the whistle that his train was coming. Even then, he walked leisurely around the end of the building, until, as he approached the corner, he was suddenly aware of some excitement other than that occasioned by the results of the game.

Across the street from the station and on the other side of the railway tracks, a pair of restive horses, attached to a light carriage, frightened by the noisy demonstrations of the crowd and by the oncoming train,

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were getting beyond the control of the driver. Suddenly a terrible cry went up from the crowd ; shrieks from the women, deep, hoarse groans from the men. A little child, of four or five years, unnoticed before, had come running down the avenue from the hotel to within three or four yards of the rearing, plunging team ; then, frightened, had turned and run a few steps onto the track, where she stopped, her back to the approaching train, seeing only the horses and bewildered by the cries of the crowd.

She was so far away and the train so near, it was futile to think of saving her, and after that one great cry, every one stood as though paralyzed, when a powerful form shot out from the corner of the station, past the speechless, breathless crowd, and Denning, with the roar of the train in his ears and its hot breath on his cheek, caught the little one by the belt of her broad sash and swinging her with one hand at arm's length before him, turned on his heel just as the engine rushed past.

A roar of applause went up from the crowd that an instant before had been still with the hush of death. Scarcely knowing what he had done, Denning paid no heed to the applause, for as he held the child in his arms, close to his breast, he was conscious of a new sensation, as sweet as it was strange.

His sudden grasp of the child and the suspension in mid air had given her a shock, and for an instant, her lips quivered, though she did not utter a cry, but smiled bravely into his eyes as he took her in his arms. But when the people burst forth, in round after round of cheers, and began to crowd wildly about her, she turned from them all and clasping her arms about

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Denning's neck, hid her face on his shoulder. Then it was, with the child's face against his cheek, the wavy golden hair brushing his face and rippling across his breast, that the strong man, the man of the world, thrilled to the touch of the little fingers and trembled. Something new, a sweetness never before tasted, had come into his life, and unconsciously, he strained the little one to his breast as though he would never let her go.

"Why, it's Mrs. Wynne's little girl," exclaimed some one from the hotel, "I will take her to her mother; she must be worried to death about her."

"I will take her, myself," said Denning, feeling the little arms tighten about his neck.

"Evans," he called to the conductor, "I've got to go to the hotel, but I'll be back inside of five minutes."

Evans nodded. The train was a Sunday "special," scheduled to stop for five minutes at the Springs, but it would stop longer than that for Denning, who was one of the heaviest stockholders in the company.

"What is your name, little one?" Denning asked as he left the crowd and started up the avenue.

"Helen; Helen Wynne," she answered; then smiling confidently into his face, she added:

"I guess I would have been runned over if it hadn't been for you, wouldn't I?"

Denning shuddered as he began to realize what she had escaped.

"How did you come to be down there all alone?" he asked.

"I was out with Lena and she stopped to speak to a man, and they went into a candy shop. Then all that big crowd came by and I lost her. And I wanted to

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see the men in red blouses and caps, so I went down to the station, and first I knew I saw the horses and the people screamed so, I was frightened and didn't know what to do. I 'spect," she added reflectively, "that Lena is just scared to death about me by this time, don't you?"

"If she isn't, she ought to be," Denning replied. "She had no business to leave you alone in that mob."

"There she is now, with mamma, looking for me, and she does look scared, doesn't she?" and the little one laughed triumphantly, waving one hand, while she kept the other persistently clasped about Denning's neck.

He observed the two coming down the avenue towards them. One was a young woman, in nursemaid's cap and apron, whose pale, tear-stained face bore evidence of her recent fright. The other, Denning at once recognized as the woman whose singular beauty had arrested his attention in the dining room the preceding evening. Now, as then, she was dressed in black, with a dark red rose as her only ornament, but her gown to-day was of black net, through which her exquisitely moulded neck and shoulders and beautifully rounded arms gleamed with the same pure ivory tint which had distinguished her face the night before.

She was frowning slightly, but to Denning's keen observation, the frown seemed less an expression of anxiety than of annoyance. His impression was confirmed by Helen, who remarked naively:

"I guess I'm going to get a talking to; mamma's got her talkative face on."

He could scarcely restrain a smile at her corrobor-

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tion of his thought, but he bowed gravely to Mrs. Wynne, as he lifted his hat.

"I found your little one at the station, madam, and as it did not seem a very safe place for her, I thought I would bring her to the hotel."

"I thank you very much. We were quite anxious about her and you have placed us under great obligations; but I regret she should have caused you this trouble."

"It was no trouble, I assure you, only a pleasure——"

"And he was so nice, mamma," Helen interposed eagerly, "I would have been runned over if it hadn't been for him."

"I dare say you would," Mrs. Wynne replied, not dreaming of taking the child's words literally: "You had no right to go to the station, because you knew mamma had forbidden it. You may go with Lena directly to your room and we will talk this over by and by, and see what is to be done with a little girl who disobeys her mamma."

The brown eyes looked slyly into Denning's face with an "I-told-you-so," but she seemed in no haste to leave him.

"Helen!" said her mother sternly.

The little one turned and putting both arms about Denning's neck, held up her lips for a kiss. Strangely moved, he kissed her.

"Good-by, Mr. Man," she said, "I thank you for bringing me home, and I'll see you again, some other day—won't I?" she queried rather wistfully.

"I hope so, Helen; I will certainly want to see you," he replied, as he gently released her.

Her mother had looked on in amazement.

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"Helen Wynne, I am astonished!" she exclaimed.

The child did not vouchsafe even a look in reply, but walked rapidly up the avenue, in advance of Lena. Mrs. Wynne glanced inquiringly at Denning, almost as though she would ask an explanation of her conduct.

"These little ones usually know their friends and whom to trust," he said with a smile; "they are not half so likely to make mistakes as some of us older ones."

She saw that something had touched his feelings deeply, and wisely refrained from any comment.

"Perhaps so," was her only reply.

"Pardon me," he added, "if I suggest that the maid was far more to blame than the child in this affair."

"She was, of course; but she has been sufficiently punished in the fright she has suffered. Helen, when she found herself alone, should have returned at once to the hotel."

"I think that would hardly have been possible, under the circumstances, with the crowd that was surging just then in the opposite direction."

She divined his motive and smiled: "I did not know that," she said, "I will be lenient accordingly."

"Thank you," he said, and lifted his hat as he turned to leave.

"I don't know how to thank you for your kindness," she said, with more cordiality than she had yet shown.

"Please don't thank me; it was a pleasure, and nothing but a pleasure," and with another salute, he turned and passed swiftly down the avenue to the train awaiting him.

X

UNLOOKED FOR RESULTS

HOLLINGSHEAD remained at the Springs till toward the close of the following week ; when he appeared one morning, at an hour unusual for him, in Denning's private office.

"Hullo, old man!" was his laconic greeting addressed to Denning's broad back as he sat before his desk. The latter swung himself quickly around in his swivel chair.

"Hullo, Dick! Where have you kept yourself? Haven't seen you for nearly a week."

"Didn't seem jolly anxious to see me when you had the chance."

"Sunday, you mean? Sorry about that, Dick, awfully sorry; but I had an important engagement with Rigby and it took more time than I expected. Business, you know, Dick."

"Oh, business, of course; nobody who knew you would have any doubt of that. Do you know, Mac,"—Hollingshead lay back in a comfortable chair, thrusting his hands in his pockets as he looked at Denning with a mocking smile—"if you're ever fortunate enough to get to the 'Happy Land' they used to tell us little Sunday School chaps about, that the first thing you'll do will be to sit down and organize a stock company to get exclusive control of the golden streets of the New Jerusalem?"

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"I'm not thinking what I'll do under those conditions. This is the only world we're sure of and I'm going to make the most of it."

"Exactly. In other words, you've staked out the 'Earth' and are going to get it patented. I only hope," he added pensively, "there'll be a small place left in it for your humble servant."

Denning smiled: "That is just what I intend doing now. I am making new plans, Dick, which will include a place for you. I'm not ready to say anything definite just yet, but when I am, you'll be the first to know."

"Thanks, awfully, old man. I'm in no hurry, you know; any time will do," Hollingshead answered coolly, supposing it all a joke. "I'm off this morning for a couple of weeks, and just ran in for a minute or two."

"Off? Where?"

"British Columbia. Got a wire this morning from Richards. He wants me to look at some properties up there."

"Richards? Is that so?"

"Yes; the old duffer took a liking to me for showing him round when he was here. He told me he was going from here to look up some B. C. properties and that he would wire me when he was ready."

"Be gone a couple of weeks, did you say?"

"About that. I suppose," Hollingshead added, "when I get back you'll be fairly in the swim. You plunged in Saturday night in good shape."

"Oh, well;" Denning laughed, "that sort of thing pleases people, you know."

"You're right, old man, and some of the 'people'

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happen to be men worth standing in with. But your cleverest piece of work was Sunday afternoon ; that life-saving business."

"That little child!" Denning exclaimed, "Good God! Dick, are you a fool? Do you suppose there was any policy business about that? Why, man alive! I didn't have time to think of anything. There the little thing stood, with that train roaring like hell itself, right down upon her! I don't know what I did, or how I did it—and you call it a clever piece of work!"

"Beg your pardon, old man; I was only chaffing. I take it back. But, by Jove, it was fine! Splendid! I tell you, your stock soared then. They didn't talk about anything else that night; they wanted to get up a testimonial, but they were afraid you wouldn't take it right. There's one thing certain," he added, "you won't need any introduction to Mrs. Wynne now."

"Well, what do I care about that?" Denning asked quietly; "I don't know that that counts one way or the other. I met Mrs. Wynne when I took the child to the hotel and she was as cool as an iced cucumber."

"That was before she knew the particulars," Hollingshead replied quickly.

"I don't know that I'm interested in Mrs. Wynne," said Denning, after a pause. "But, Dick, you should have seen the child! The little creature clung to me all the way to the hotel; she wouldn't leave me till her mother insisted; then she kissed me good-by. She was the sweetest little bit of humanity I've ever come across and she affected me some way—I don't know how—I can't get over it; I can't forget

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her, somehow. I've felt a different sort of man some way since holding that little child in my arms."

Hollingshead, looking curiously at his old chum, saw, for the first time, the steel-blue eyes strangely softened, suffused with a tender light, and for once, there was no mockery in his own. He looked away.

"I guess, Mac, old man," he said slowly, after a pause, "we've been so busy making money that we've missed some mighty good things without knowing it. And now," he added, with a lighter touch, "it's getting rather late in the day. We're a pair of confirmed old bachelors."

A peculiar look crossed Denning's face, but Hollingshead did not see it. He looked at his watch, closed it with a snap and jumped to his feet.

"Great Cæsar! it's nearly train time; I must get a move on myself. So long, old man; be good to yourself."

"Good luck to you, Dick! When you come back, I'll have a proposition for you."

"All right. I'm open to anything, matrimony included. Look after the ladies over there, Mac; I leave 'em in your care. By the way, what do you think Mrs. Durant called you?"

"Nothing flattering."

"Depends on how you look at it. She says you're a 'sublime egoist.'"

Denning thought an instant; then laughed: "By George! that's not half bad either. Give her my compliments. I didn't suppose she had that much penetration, and I thought she was rather keen, too."

"Oh, she's bright; she has ideas now and then that set a fellow thinking, only they're generally done up

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in so much nonsense it's like hunting for a collar button in a barrel of excelsior, to find 'em," and with a laugh, Hollingshead flung himself out of the office.

By the end of the week the arrangements with Rigby had been completed. Nothing remained for Denning, but to make such disposal of his present interests that, with the beginning of the new year, he could enter, free and untrammelled, upon his newer and larger work.

But while flushed with his recent success and busied with new plans, there had come to him that week an unrest and discontent unknown before. The touch of a little child had unconsciously aroused something of the paternal instinct, hitherto dormant, and awakened a craving that would not be satisfied. As yet, he had not fully recognized it. He only knew, as he had confessed to Hollingshead, that he could not forget the little one whom Fate had thrown in his way. Again and again, in the office, at the mine, in the bank, he had recalled the big brown eyes, smiling so bravely and trustingly into his own ; had felt the light, clinging pressure of the little arms about his neck, and the swift, sweet touch of the cool, dewy lips upon his own.

But it was not until the following Saturday afternoon, when a little white-robed figure flew down the avenue to meet him, and, as he lifted her and held her to his breast, the haunting memories of the week again became a reality, that Denning knew the truth.

"Oh, Mr. Man," she cooed in his ear. "I've watched for you every single day for so many days, and now you've come !"

"And are you glad ?" he asked.

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"So glad," extending her arms as far apart as she could reach, while the laughing brown eyes travelling from tip to tip of the outstretched fingers, measured her joy at his coming.

As he gently released her at the door of the hotel, she said :

"My mamma would like to see you in the parlor. Shall I tell her you will be there?"

"Certainly ; I will come at once."

As quickly as possible he escaped from the congratulations showered upon him, on what was termed his "heroism."

"There was no heroism about it," he replied, with a touch of impatience ; "I simply acted on the spur of the moment, without even knowing what I was doing. I haven't thought of it since and don't wish anything said about it."

It was true the incident itself had nearly passed from his thoughts ; only the results remained.

As he entered the parlor, Mrs. Wynne advanced toward him.

"Under the circumstances, Mr. Denning," she said, smiling, "I hardly think an introduction necessary. (He recalled Hollingshead's words). Won't you be seated?"

He bowed over the hand she extended but seated himself silently, with a slight feeling of irritation. He knew what was coming ; she had a burden of thanks to discharge and he was to be burdened with receiving it ; it was a bore, but he was helpless.

"Mr. Denning, I don't know which to try to express first, my gratitude for what you have done, or

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my apology for such seeming indifference and ingratitude last Sunday afternoon ; but really, I had no idea of what had occurred——”

“Pardon me, Mrs. Wynne, but there is no need of apology ; you, of course, could not have known what had happened, and had you known, there would have been no cause for gratitude to me. Whatever I may have done was so entirely without thought or plan on my part, that I deserve no more credit for what I did, than I would have deserved blame, had I failed.”

“You cannot expect others to take that view of the affair, Mr. Denning, least of all, the mother of the child. I feel under great obligations to you.”

“Really,” he smiled, “I am sorry, I wish you didn’t ; for I have come to ask a favor of you, and if you feel in any way obligated to me, I shall not feel at liberty to make my request.”

She looked slightly taken aback, but smiled in turn : “I am sure, Mr. Denning, I should be very glad—after what you have——”

He raised his hand : “No, that won’t do at all. If you grant the favor, it must be to me, personally, without any consideration of anything I have done. I was at no cost or pains, and even though I were, your little daughter’s friendship has amply repaid me. But I am going to ask, as a special favor, Mrs. Wynne, without reference to the occurrence of Sunday afternoon, that you will allow the friendship between your little daughter and myself to continue as it has begun.”

Denning understood the surprise which she felt, but was too well bred to manifest.

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"I consider that very kind of you, Mr. Denning. I really feared Helen might annoy you, for she has formed the most ardent attachment for you imaginable. She has thought and talked of you constantly, all the week."

Denning smiled again: "I assure you, Mrs. Wynne, the attachment is mutual. The little one has been in my thoughts the past week, and I was very glad to find to-day that she had not forgotten me."

"Forgotten you!" she exclaimed, with a little laugh; "she not only has not forgotten you, but she will not allow you to forget her! That is the child's greatest fault. She is affectionate, but so demonstrative as to be rather wearisome sometimes. I have tried to repress her, but she is irrepressible. She is so like her father; no one would think she was my child."

Denning, watching the speaker with his quietly scrutinizing gaze, wondered if the father's demonstrativeness had proved "rather wearisome sometimes." It seemed quite probable. There was no need for her to emphasize the child's unlikeness to herself; it was patent. Not once, during their interview, had the ivory pallor of her face flushed ever so faintly, even when speaking of her child's narrow escape; and the exquisitely modulated tones were equally devoid of warmth or color.

At Denning's request, Helen was called, and the two entered at once into a compact, duly ratified by Mrs. Wynne, for their mutual diversion and entertainment on his future visits to the Springs. It would have been difficult to tell which was

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more interested in the projects under consideration, the worldly wise man, or the quaintly wise little maiden.

Hollingshead's two weeks' stay in British Columbia was prolonged to six weeks. It was midsummer when he again found himself nearing what he familiarly termed "the old camping ground."

As it was the latter part of the week, he contented himself, on reaching Henley with merely a look at the town from the car window. Happening to see the janitor of the bank building ornamenting one of the benches outside of the station, he tossed him a quarter.

"Here, you Bob! tell Mr. Denning I'm back; at the Springs. I'll see him Saturday."

"Golly, boss!" the darkey grinned as he dexterously caught the quarter, "Mistah Denning, he's at the Springs hese'f; he's ober dar ebery two, three nights, he! he! he!"

"The deuce, you say!" Hollingshead sank back into the seat in a state bordering on a mental collapse.

"Now what does that mean?" he soliloquized; "I'd stake my last dollar on Mac, that he isn't hit; I don't believe the woman exists that could make an impression on him. We are two hardened old bachelors, complete ossification of the heart, and Mac's the worse of the two. If he ever marries at all, it won't be for love, but for the furtherance of some scheme of his own; and, by Jove! he said when I went away he had something new in mind. Well, well, if Mac plays the fool, I don't see anything left for yours truly but to go and do likewise."

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By the time Hollingshead arrived at the Springs, the world had assumed a neutral, gray tint, in quite marked contrast to the roseate hue which it usually wore for him, and though after a bath and change of linen it had brightened perceptibly, he was yet in a pensive mood as he left his room and strolled down the long hall. He had a vague presentiment of coming change. Before he went away he had been subtly conscious that he and Denning seemed drifting slightly apart; now he felt as though his old companion were being swept onward with the tide, while he was left stranded and alone. He was distinctly lonely; he felt a need for sympathy, a faint, only half acknowledged longing for a word of welcome after his absence.

At that psychological moment, Psyche suddenly dashed against his legs in a wriggling frenzy of delight, and so abject was his condition that he stooped and gratefully caressed the little animal. The next moment, sympathy and welcome personified loomed before him, as Mrs. Durant rounded the corner of a side passage. The meeting was unexpected, but the joy that lighted her face was unmistakable and was instantly reflected in his own. Moreover, she wore an exceedingly becoming gown.

"My *dear* Mr. Hollingshead, is this really you? I am so glad to see you. Where have you been all this time? I have inquired for you of Mr. Denning, over and over again. When did you arrive?"

"Less than an hour ago," he smiled, as he sandwiched in a reply at the first opportunity.

"And are you well? I thought when I first saw you, you had the doldrums; you looked it."

"I believe I did have a touch of something of the

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kind. Hadn't met a soul since I got in, except the clerk, and he doesn't count, you know."

"Of course not; then am I the first to welcome you back? How fortunate! And you've been gone such an age! Come this way; there's an hour yet before dinner—Psyche, dear, don't devour Mr. Hollingshead. There, isn't this delightful, so like old times!"

She had led the way to a small balcony at the end of the hall, overlooking the avenue, where they seated themselves. Hollingshead gave a sigh of relief.

"This is immense! I say, you know, Mrs. Durant, after jaunting about as I have for the last six weeks, this seems quite like getting home."

"How charming! I'm sure the place hasn't seemed the same to me with you away. I've had absolutely no one to talk to—that is, nobody worth while—and just when there was so much going on that you'd be interested in! You haven't met Mr. Denning?"

"No."

"And, of course, you haven't heard the news about him and Mrs. Wynne?"

"Mrs. Wynne! Then it's Mrs. Wynne, is it?"

"Oh, then you have heard something?"

"Nothing definite; only a hint there was something, I couldn't imagine what. Do inform me; is Denning really 'hit' at last?"

Mrs. Durant regarded him rather narrowly for an instant, before she replied with a gravity unusual with her.

"Mr. Denning will never marry any woman for love; he is not that sort of man, and you and I know it."

Hollingshead was not a little surprised at this echo of his own thoughts.

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"But how did it come about, anyway?" he asked curiously. "When I went away he did not seem especially interested in Mrs. Wynne; he was greatly taken with the child, I remember—after that railway episode, you know."

"Yes, I know; it is all the result of that railway episode, and I suppose when Providence, or Fate, brings two people together, it doesn't matter whether they're interested in, or suited to, each other. The whole affair would be ridiculous, if it were not pathetic—or pathetic, if it were not so ridiculous, I don't know which. You have just stated the key to the whole situation, Mr. Hollingshead! Mr. Denning is infatuated with little Helen—and the little thing simply adores him—and he naturally would like to adopt her as his child. The only obstacle in the way is the mother; but he is not a man to be hindered by obstacles, and as the mother would not be objectionable as a wife, he will marry her in order to have the child as his own."

"Impossible! Why, Mrs. Durant, the idea is preposterous; Denning wouldn't be such a fool!"

Mrs. Durant laughed softly: "My dear Mr. Hollingshead, until a man marries, no one can tell what possibilities he may develop in that direction. I am simply consumed with curiosity now," she added significantly, "to see what latent capacities along this line will unfold in your own case."

Her merriment was contagious, but Hollingshead felt a hidden meaning lurking in her words, and her laughing eyes confirmed the suspicion.

"But really, Mrs. Durant, is there anything in it? That is, more than simple courtesy, you know?"

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“Decidedly ; of late. At first, Mr. Denning confined his attentions to little Helen ; brought her candy and toys and took her out driving, with Lena on the seat with the coachman—it’s a wonder they haven’t struck up a match, too,—and Mrs. Wynne kept discreetly out of sight, though he was always received in her private parlor, you know. But last week, he began to come oftener, and last Saturday, when he took Helen for a drive, it was mamma, if you please, not Lena, who accompanied them. This is the second time he has been over this week, and this afternoon, Mr. Denning and Mrs. Wynne have gone for a drive, with no coachman and no Helen. So it looks like a regular geometrical progression, doesn’t it ?”

“It looks that way, by Jove !” he admitted rather gloomily. “Do you suppose,” he added reflectively, “that she is the sort of woman to take advantage of his infatuation for the child, to—er—well, inveigle him into this thing ?”

She looked steadily into his eyes, as she replied, “Do you think Mr. Denning is the sort of man to be ‘inveigled’ ?”

“No, he isn’t,” he answered, rather staggered by the disclosure that her knowledge of Denning was more correct than his own.

“‘All the king’s horses and all the king’s men’——” she quoted, with a slight laugh ; then noting the gloom on his face, she continued with a seriocomic air :

“It all comes, you see, of having a lovely little daughter to win her way into people’s affections. There is no knowing what conquests I might have made under similar conditions ; but I ? I have noth-

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ing but Psyche, poor little dear, who is forever getting under foot and in the way, and leaving dust marks on people's clothes. Poor me !”

She drew such a tragic sigh and looked so pointedly at Hollingshead that he laughed, though with visible embarrassment, but before he could reply, she exclaimed :

“I hear them coming, there they are now !”

A stylish turnout, the two spirited bays driven tandem, came up the avenue. Denning was a fine reinsman and Hollingshead thought he had never seen him appear to better advantage. Mrs. Wynne seemed totally unconscious of the throng of spectators watching them from the club house and hotel.

“They’re a well matched pair, aren’t they ?” Hollingshead commented.

“In appearance, yes ; they are a splendid looking couple.”

When they had passed around the driveway, out of sight, Mrs. Durant quoted lightly :

“‘To him that hath shall be given and he shall have more abundance, but from him that hath not’——” there was a little break in her voice and she stopped. Hollingshead turned quickly, but her face was averted. She recovered herself, however, and continued :

“That seems to be the principle that governs life in this world, but I cannot see the justice or fairness of it ; can you ?”

She turned and found his eyes fixed on her and observed, for the first time, their troubled, almost wistful, look.

“Mr. Hollingshead, forgive me for not thinking before how this might strike you. I believe it has

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hit you rather hard, you and Mr. Denning have been associated together so long, you know."

He shook his head, with an oddly pathetic smile : "Mac and I"—unconsciously using the familiar name for the first time in her presence—"have been chums for more than fifteen years ; but I don't suppose that is any reason for imagining that we would continue so for fifteen years to come. In a haphazard world like this, where the unexpected always happens, we ought to be prepared for shocks ; but we seldom are."

XI

A CHANCE MEETING

DENNING failed to put in an appearance in the dining room that evening. The report, later, of a small dinner party in Mrs. Wynne's apartments explained his absence.

Among men and women, at the hotel, the club house, in the billiard rooms and bowling alleys, wherever Hollingshead went that evening, the "Denning-Wynne affair" as it was called, was the subject of comment. Their engagement was taken for granted and the private dinner was considered almost in the light of an announcement.

The men unanimously spoke of it as "a good match."

"They're a damned handsome couple, and they've got the stuff," was Benham's characteristic comment.

"High-steppers, both of 'em and well matched," said Biggs, the stockman.

The women were somewhat divided in their opinion

"It is so sweetly romantic," purred Mrs. Gordon, "just like the novels I like best. I can hardly wait for the next chapter."

"Romantic fiddlesticks!" sniffed another. "The most consummate piece of art *I* call it. Too cunning to go after him herself, but gets her little girl to wheedle

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him up to her apartments while she devotes herself to her 'invalid aunt'! Has anybody ever seen that aunt? I believe she's nothing but a myth!"

"Mrs. Durant, what do you think of it?" said one of the group appealingly.

"I?" said that person, with a merry laugh, and a glance at Hollingshead, standing near. "Oh, I call it a special dispensation of Providence."

Hollingshead smiled and walked away, while speaker Number Two gave Mrs. Durant a look which said as plainly as words.

"You are another!"

Returning to the hotel at a late hour that night, Hollingshead stumbled upon Denning as the latter was on his way to the station for the last train.

"Hullo, Dick! I heard you got in this evening, and was sorry I couldn't see you at dinner. I was engaged, but got away as quick as I could, but you were gone and I couldn't find you. How are you, old boy? And how did the trip pan out?"

"Fine! Took considerably longer than I expected, but it paid well."

"I didn't think you were staying up there for nothing. Coming over to Henley to-morrow, Dick?"

"Why, no; I hadn't intended to. Thought I'd rest up to-morrow."

"I know; but run over for an hour or so, if you can. I haven't time to go into details now, but you'll remember I told you when you went away that I was making new plans but wasn't ready then to say definitely what they were. I had no idea, of course, you would be gone so long, or I might have been more specific. Well, I have an important en-

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gagement for to-morrow night—some final matters to adjust—but I want to see you first.”

“Very well, make it any time that suits you.”

“Well, say two o’clock ; or, I’ll tell you, Dick, meet me at the Bon Ton at one-fifteen for lunch, and we’ll go from there to the office.”

“All right, Mac ; I’ll be on hand.”

Both men started onward as though the interview were closed ; then stopped and simultaneously turned, facing each other, though, for an instant, neither spoke. The ray of a distant arc light fell on Denning’s face, revealing it clearly to Hollingshead, his own being in the shadow.

“I say, old man ; is there any connection between these new plans you spoke of six weeks ago and the rumors afloat here to-day ?”

Denning waited an instant : “No, and yes. There was no connection at that time. My plans had then no relation whatever to—er—later events. But the latter are included in the plans at present.”

“There is truth in the rumors, then ?”

Unconsciously, there was in Hollingshead’s tone the desperate energy which one summons to his aid in demanding from a physician the truth regarding a case which is past hope.

“Yes. That is one thing I want to go over with you to-morrow, before any public announcement is made.”

There was nothing, either in Denning’s face or tones, to indicate that he was speaking of anything more than ordinary business. Hollingshead involuntarily took a step nearer.

“I suppose then, old man, congratulations are in order, aren’t they ?”

A CHANCE MEETING

Then Denning smiled ; a peculiar smile, in which mockery and bitterness, contending with a sort of fierce pride, mingled with the old-time friendliness and comradeship.

“No need for anything of that sort between us, Dick ; we understand each other too well. There’ll be enough of it from the ‘crowd’ over there when they get hold of it,”—he glanced contemptuously toward the hotel—“but you and I can be frank with each other. I know I can trust you, old boy, every time, and that’s better than all the hollow ‘congratulations’ of society. Good night. See you to-morrow.”

Deeply puzzled, but glad that his old chum had not, under the new order of things, thrown him over, Hollingshead went on his way.

XII

AN EXPLANATION

"I'VE been planning a change of base for some time ; in fact, for over a year."

Denning and Hollingshead, locked within the former's private office, had been silently smoking for some ten minutes when Denning suddenly made the above announcement. Then swinging himself about in the swivel chair to a position facing his friend, he tipped back at a comfortable angle and continued :

"The fact is, Dick, I want to get out of the mining business."

Hollingshead's face showed surprise, but he only nodded.

"The mine now will practically run itself under the supervision of a man that understands the business and yield good, plump dividends for ten or twenty years to come. So there's no need of my being tied down to that any longer. I think I told you, years ago, Dick, that I came from a long line of bankers and brokers. Somehow it runs in the blood and develops in every one of us, sooner or later. I started the bank here as a sort of experiment, to see if I had the family instinct. The results have been eminently satisfactory to me—and to some others as well, it seems—so, naturally, I have felt that I was done with experimenting and ready to take up the

AN EXPLANATION

real thing whenever I had the opportunity. Six weeks ago the opportunity presented itself."

Hollingshead dropped eagerly forward to listen, the cigar between his fingers unheeded.

"You may have seen in the papers lately occasional mention of a new bank to be organized in Rockland, to supersede the two that suspended payment two or three years ago?"

"I have seen something of the kind, but I paid no special attention to it, so I don't recall it very definitely."

"The organization is to be completed this coming fall, and it is practically in the hands of Rigby, the receiver for the defaulted banks."

"Is that the Rigby that was at the Springs the Sunday before I went away?"

"The same."

"Oh, I see!" Hollingshead exclaimed, a new light breaking in upon him: "You and he were hobnobbing all day, I remember."

"And as the result of our hobnobbing, when the new North Western National, of Rockland, opens its doors for business, yours truly will head its list of officials."

"What! as president?"

"As president."

"Good! by Jove! Shake, old man; I congratulate you!"

They shook hands heartily.

"And you say," said Hollingshead, after a discussion of details regarding the new bank,—“you say it is to open up January first?"

"Yes."

"That lets you out of here—when?"

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Denning hesitated : " Well, I had thought to stay here—with the exception of two or three trips to Rockland—until toward the last of December, but recent events have necessitated a change."

He paused an instant, then added : " My marriage is to be the first week in October."

For a moment or two, neither spoke, and it seemed to Hollingshead as though a dead weight had fallen upon them both. Once or twice he essayed to speak, but the words would not come. Finally, with a touch of desperation, he exclaimed :

" By Jove, Mac ! Somehow I can't think of you as a married man."

Denning smiled constrainedly : " I don't mind admitting to you, Dick, that the step is rather unpremeditated."

He stopped and flicked the ashes from his cigar as though uncertain how best to proceed.

" I suppose, though, it may as well be now as any time. I expect to stick to banking for a number of years and when I quit it, it will be for politics."

" The deuce, you say ! " Hollingshead was not only surprised, but he failed to see the connection between politics and matrimony.

" I suppose that is in the blood, too," Denning continued ; " my grandfather was an M. P.,—very likely my father is by this time—and I may as well tell you, Dick, that I intend, before I am twenty years older, to be in Congress myself. I believe I have the qualifications for success and there's no reason why, when the right time comes, I shouldn't go in and win."

AN EXPLANATION

"Gad ! I believe you would win, too !" muttered Hollingshead, his face glowing with enthusiasm.

"In this connection, I had, in a general way, contemplated marriage sometime in the future,—you know, in our country, the right sort of wife sometimes goes a long way toward winning in politics and always adds to the prestige of the winner—but, as I say, a marriage in the near future was, until recently, entirely unpremeditated. At the same time, I doubt if, after years of waiting, I could make a better selection. The lady herself is eminently fitted to grace an establishment, whether west or east ; in Washington, or New York—or abroad."

But Hollingshead was thinking less of Mrs. Wynne's qualifications than of a conviction slowly forcing itself upon his consciousness.

"Did you have anything of this kind in mind when I went away ?" he asked.

"Not a thought of it. Frankly, Dick, it never occurred to me till within the last two weeks."

"It isn't like you, Mac, to decide a thing in that off-hand fashion."

There was a pause ; then, flinging away his cigar, Denning said, "I can trust you, Dick, that it will go no farther. You remember my telling you of the effect that little child had on me from the first ? Well, I can't explain it, but that child has got a hold on me that I can't break. I don't like children, as a rule, but she's not like other children ; she hasn't their usual disagreeable traits. And affectionate ? She thinks more of me than of all the world besides, her mother included : never obtrusive or in the way, but perfectly happy when she can be with me. I've got

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so that I look forward to the pleasure of seeing her come down that avenue to meet me, I wouldn't miss it for a good deal. Well, about two weeks ago, Helen told me that she and her mother were going away before long. Man, alive! I didn't know till then what a hold the child had on me! Let that little creature go out of my life? Never, if I could prevent it! 'Pon my soul, Dick, I didn't sleep much that night; but when morning came, my mind was made up and my plans laid accordingly and—you know the result."

Hollingshead stared at Denning incredulously. Mrs. Durant's words had flashed into his mind.

"Mac, old man," he exclaimed slowly, "you don't mean to tell me that you are going to marry Mrs. Wynne solely for the sake of her child!"

Denning moved impatiently: "I said a few minutes ago, Dick, that Mrs. Wynne is in every way fitted to be the wife I should want. She is the sort of woman I intended to marry, sooner or later. Is there anything to deter me from making my choice now, instead of five or ten years hence? Surely, the fact that her child is already fond of me, is an argument in favor of the proposition, not against it. And, really, —I have looked at the matter from all sides—I think you will agree with me that this is the most opportune time for such a marriage. I am about to make a complete change in business, going to a large, growing city, and to enter upon my life there as a married man, a man of a family,—for I shall adopt Helen as my own and no one there need know to the contrary—will be more to my advantage socially, than to continue the single life I have led here."

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Hollingshead nodded doubtfully, but made no reply. Denning's sophistry had, in a measure, relieved the glaring baldness of the situation. At the same time there was brought home to him as never before, the force of Mrs. Durant's mocking appellation,—“a sublime egoist !”

Denning laughed, laying his hand on the other's knee: “I see, Dick, this doesn't quite go down with you ; but, old fellow, you and I have got beyond the sentimental point ; at least, I have. The time is past for me to think of marrying for love—if ever there was such a time, which I doubt,” he added gloomily.

“Well, Mac,” said the other slowly, “I wish you happiness ; with all my heart, I do.”

“Happiness?” repeated Denning, “I shall be happy in the successes I am to win ; that is all the happiness I expect, or want.”

Then, with a sudden change of manner, he added. “But all this is a digression. I was talking business until I sidetracked onto this affair. Where was I?”

“I think,” said Hollingshead, smiling, “you were speaking of the date of closing up here, when you—digressed.”

“Yes ; well, it looks now as though I would have to wind things up here toward the last of September ; that is, in about eight or nine weeks.”

He passed the cigars to Hollingshead, taking one himself which he prepared to light.

“I believe, Dick, I told you the morning you went away, that my new plans included a place for you?”

Hollingshead opened his eyes in amazement.

“Nonsense, Mac ; that was all in joke.”

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"On your part, perhaps ; but not on mine. Dick, would any consideration tempt you to settle down in Henley for a few years?"

"I don't know that I've any objection to Henley. I've made it my headquarters for the last three years."

"Well, what I meant by that was, to give up this experting business for a steady position."

"I might, if the position was all right. This expert work is pretty hard on a fellow sometimes ; this last trip was a rough one, by Jove ! a terror !"

"How about the supervision of the Bonnibel and looking after my city property here, at twenty-five thousand a year?"

"Do you mean it, Mac?"

"I've said it and I mean it. It's up to you, Dick, now."

"It's a go, then, old man ; and I'm much obliged to you for thinking of me. The best part of it," he added, as they again shook hands, "is, that this will keep us in touch with one another, for a while, anyway."

"No reason, because I'm going to Rockland, that we shouldn't keep in touch, same as ever."

"How about the other proposition, Mac? Won't that make any difference?"

"My marriage? That's merely an incident, between us two, a side issue. Now, let's to business and straighten out these matters before those fellows get here."

XIII

A WOMAN'S PREDICTION

NOT until the following September was it generally known that Denning was to leave Henley. With the looked-for news of his rapidly approaching wedding, came the unexpected announcement of his intention to make his future home in another State, together with rumors of his connection with the prospective North Western bank. The news caused no little stir in and around Henley and the following days found Denning's offices thronged with acquaintances, inquiring, congratulating, protesting. Even then, it was not known who would have charge of his local interests after his departure, and to the other crowd was added a long line of applicants for the position.

It was nearly midnight the following Saturday when Hollingshead reached the Springs. He was alone, for since Mrs. Wynne's departure soon after the announcement of their engagement, Denning seldom left Henley. He was tired, for he had spent the week familiarizing himself with the work he was soon to assume and assisting Denning in his preparations for leaving. He was depressed; the pleasurable excitement of the last few days had been followed by a reaction. He felt keenly the coming change in Denning's life and the personal loss it would mean to himself. They had been so closely affiliated for years that the association could

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not be suddenly broken off without a wrench to one or the other, and Hollingshead, not Denning, was the one to suffer. He felt they would have little more in common and the bond between them must, of necessity, be weakened,—perhaps, eventually, broken.

His depression had not entirely passed when he awoke at a late hour Sunday morning. He brooded in solitude until after dinner; then, led by an impulse he could scarcely have explained even to himself and which he did not stop to analyze, he went in search of Mrs. Durant.

Of late, he had found her society distinctly pleasing. In her unvarying cheerfulness his gloom invariably was dissipated like mist before the sun, and beneath the froth and foam of her light chatter and nonsense he had discovered a deep, strong undercurrent of sympathy and true womanly feeling. He had come to have a genuine respect for her opinions, which, however startling they might seem at first sight, never failed of confirmation, either by the facts as they developed, or by his own judgment later.

He found her in a vine-covered corner of the veranda, having been guided thither by an ecstatic little yelp from Psyche, who had recognized him at a distance.

"Am I intruding?" he asked, noting the magazine which she flung aside as she rose to greet him.

"On the contrary, your coming is very opportune," she replied, with a laughing glance in its direction; "I'd just got to where the prince, in disguise and with a price upon his head, is surrounded by enemies and carried off, while the beautiful maiden who has told him she is a princess and has promised to save him, is

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discovered to be a fraud,—only to find that it's 'to be continued.' Fancy leaving them in such a predicament a whole month !”

“I should think the author would need a month in which to extricate them from their difficulties.”

“Well, it's against my principles to begin a serial story unless I can finish it. I usually wait till it's completed and then get all the numbers and read them. Then I feel as though I'd got even with the author and the publisher and the whole outfit.”

“Come to think of it, our lives are a sort of serial, aren't they, a chapter a day ?”

“And we have to read the chapters as they come, and no skipping, whether we will or not. Do you ever want to 'look ahead' and see what's coming ?”

“I never had much desire to. There are some, however,—like Denning, for instance—who seem, in a way, to take their future in their own hands and make of it about what they choose.”

“Yes, some are so situated they can steer their course through life to suit themselves, and some of us have to drift with the tide. I hear Mr. Denning is going to leave Henley ?”

“Yes, within the month.”

“Is it true, as rumored, that he is to be associated with the new bank in Rockland ?”

“It is, Mrs. Durant. He is to be president of the North Western.”

“But what is to become of all his business interests here ; his mine and railroads and houses ?”

“He will employ some one to look after them,” Hollingshead replied ; he was not yet ready to tell her of his place in the new order of affairs. “There has

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been a crowd of applicants for the place hanging about the office for the last two or three days. Some of them looked as though they jolly well needed it, too, poor fellows !”

“Probably whoever gets the place will be the one that needs it least,” she commented.

“Likely enough,” he replied, with a faint smile.

“Rockland will suit Mrs. Wynne far better than Henley,” said Mrs. Durant musingly ; “I had doubted whether she would consent to make Henley her home. I wonder if Mr. Denning is making this change on her account?”

“Not at all. It was decided upon before he ever met her. But why,” he continued curiously, “should Mrs. Wynne object to Henley? Wouldn’t you be willing to live there, Mrs. Durant?”

“Mrs. Wynne and I move on entirely different planes. I couldn’t afford to be as fastidious in my tastes as she ; but I think it would require rather a weighty inducement to lead me to remain there for any length of time ; it is so new and crude, don’t you know. I hear the wedding is to be very soon.”

“Early in October. I received the cards yesterday. It is to be a private affair, you know, only a few of Mrs. Wynne’s friends present, but Mac insisted upon my being best man.”

“Of course he would want you ; and who is to be bridesmaid?”

“There will be none. Mrs. Wynne refused to have any, but little Helen is to be flower-girl—Mac insisted on that, too ; so she will strew their path with flowers as they leave the altar. Pretty idea, isn’t it?”

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"Very; I wouldn't have thought Mr. Denning capable of that much sentiment."

"Oh, he had nothing to do with the sentiment of the thing, but he wanted the child to have some part in the ceremony, so it is to be arranged that way."

"Rather symbolical, don't you think?" Mrs. Durant commented, with a significant glance. "But I'm afraid the dear child will have more than she can do to keep their path strewn with flowers through the years to come."

"Well, I don't know. Of course, between you and me, it isn't what would be called a love-match;" he smiled whimsically; "take two old bachelors like us and they've generally got beyond that stage of the game—though there may be exceptions. But I begin to think," he added slowly, "that they are pretty evenly matched and they'll make the race about neck and neck."

She smiled at his simile: "They might but for one reason: Mr. Denning is handicapped."

"Denning handicapped!" he exclaimed. "How? In what respect?"

"Did it never occur to you that Mr. Denning is a man with a 'past'?"

Mrs. Durant, watching Hollingshead, saw a scarcely perceptible quiver of the eyelids, but that was all.

"I think I would characterize him as a man with a future," he answered lightly.

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Hollingshead; but he has a past as well, and that is a dangerous possession with a wife like Mrs. Wynne."

In thought, Hollingshead had gone back to the night in Shasta, when he had discovered the existence

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of a secret in Denning's life. Not a word had ever passed between them regarding what occurred that night, but he had never forgotten Denning's look, or his words, on that occasion.

"If there is any secret in Mac's life," he said slowly, "I have no idea what it is. He sowed his wild oats, of course, with the rest of us, but that was years ago. I don't see what they would have to do with the case now, do you?"

"As I said before, Mr. Hollingshead, Mrs. Wynne and I move on altogether different planes; so naturally our views and opinions would differ."

"So far as my experience goes, it's no use to judge any woman by another woman; each one seems to be a law unto herself, and one never knows what to expect from any of them. But really now, Mrs. Durant," he continued, with peculiar insistence, "if you had a husband who provided a good home and all that, and laid himself out to please you—was devoted to you and your happiness, you know—would you throw him over for some little peccadillo or indiscretion that happened years before?"

It struck Mrs. Durant that the supposed case was not exactly parallel with the one under consideration, but she only answered in a low tone:

"What I would, or wouldn't do, would be no criterion, Mr. Hollingshead, for I don't believe I'm like other women, and my life certainly has not been like any other's I ever knew."

"But—er—don't you know," he protested, with evident embarrassment, "what *you* would do is what I want to know."

"I can only answer from past experience," she re-

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plied slowly, with eyes averted, a slight tremor in her voice ; “and that doesn’t fit the case you suppose, at all. My husband made my life wretched, but his own was so wretched, I could forgive everything except his deceiving me at the first.” She paused a moment, then continued in steadier tones :

“I was nothing but a child, a romantic, foolish child, when he married me. He was twenty years my senior, intensely selfish and—a drug *habitué*. He was addicted to the morphia habit. I knew nothing of it when we were married,—not until two years afterward. Then, for three years I helped him conceal the truth from others, as he had from me. I don’t know which was the worse suffering ; the two years of what seemed love, of a certain sort, alternating with neglect and abuse, or the three years of hidden, secret shame and of being obliged to live a lie. After that, it was no use, and then came two years of open disgrace and shame, besides the abuse. But I staid by him—partly because I didn’t know what else to do, partly because I cared for him still, for what he had been, or what I had imagined him to be—until my life was in danger ; then I had to leave him. That was three years ago, but I didn’t apply for a divorce even then, though my friends advised it. No,” she said in reply to Hollingshead’s look of surprise, “I didn’t and I was very glad afterward. A little more than a year ago, he met with a fatal accident. At the last—when he was in the hospital—he remembered me and begged incessantly for me. They sent for me—and I went to him—I was so glad that I could go——”

She stopped, and picking up Psyche, buried her face in the little creature’s silky coat.

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Hollingshead unconsciously leaned toward her, though he did not touch her, and she, without looking up, felt the magnetic force of his personality.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Durant," he said, his usually brusque tones strangely softened; "I am very sorry my question has called up such unhappy memories. No one would think it from your appearance——"

"No," she interposed, laughing nervously, as she lifted a flushed face and shining eyes to meet his glance, "I don't, like Mr. Denning, make the secrets of my life so conspicuous by bolts and bars as to advertise them; I simply cover them with so much rubbish and chaff, no one suspects their existence. I know I am dreadfully silly and nonsensical, but it's a habit I got into in the days when I tried to make myself and others believe that I didn't mind, don't you know? I didn't intend to tell you all this. I was trying to answer your supposition, but it was so different from anything in my experience, I guess it's no answer after all."

"I think you have answered it fully," Hollingshead replied. He was close to her now, his arm over the back of the seat.

"My past," he continued in a low tone, "has been neither better nor worse than other men's; but I wouldn't be afraid to trust my future in your hands—if you cared for me."

She remained silent. His arm slipped from the settee and encircled her waist, drawing her closer to him, while he raised her face towards his own until their eyes met.

"Can you say as much?" he asked. "Will you

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trust your future in my hands, knowing that I care for you?"

"Yes."

He was not inclined to be demonstrative and she was too wise to be, but each seemed satisfied. His arm remained about her and his hand covered hers as it rested on Psyche's head and neck.

There was silence for a while; then as naturally as though their engagement were of long standing, he began to plan their future. After a while he remarked musingly:

"I don't see how we're going to arrange about a home, you and I. I will have to be in Henley for the next few years, but I can't expect you to join me there since you don't like the place."

"But why need you remain there?" she inquired. "You have no local interests; wouldn't any other town do as well?"

"Not for my present business," he replied, smiling and enjoying her look of perplexity.

"Mac has put me in charge of his interests here," he added; "you know you said a while ago that some one who didn't need it would probably get the position."

"You? How delightful! For how long?"

"There was no time limit, I believe. So long, I suppose, as he has interests here, or I want the place. But, as I say, I don't know what we'll do for a home, so long as you won't live in Henley."

"I didn't say unconditionally that I wouldn't. I said it would require a weighty inducement for me to make my home there."

"I wonder," he said reflectively, "how weighty the inducement would need to be."

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"About two hundred avoirdupois, I think," she replied, smiling.

Later, as they stood watching the sun sink between two peaks not far distant, Hollingshead was saying :

"Yes, I'll miss Denning in a way ; we've been associated together so long. It isn't the mere fact of his going away ; he might have gone half way round the globe and it wouldn't have separated us like this marriage of his. But," he added, his eyes meeting hers with a sudden light in them that thrilled her with happiness, "Mac can go his way and I'll go mine ; I wouldn't exchange places with him to-day."

"I'm glad of one thing, Dick," she said, coming nearer and using his name for the first time, "if you marry me, it will be for my own sake, not for——"

"Not for the sake of getting Psyche," he finished the sentence, making her laugh by its absurdity.

"I suppose, however," he added a moment later, "that Psyche goes with the property ; is entailed upon me, as it were?"

"Oh, of course. What is that?—'Love me, love——' Oh Dick, *is* this a love-match ? You know what you said a while ago regarding two certain old bachelors?"

"I also said," he replied gravely, "that there were exceptions. I am one of the exceptions that prove the rule."

XIV

DOMESTIC JARS

DENNING, as president of the North Western National Bank of Rockland, soon achieved a widely different reputation from Denning, the mining man and capitalist of Henley. This, not because he was less a man of business, but more distinctly a man of the world.

His finely appointed home was the centre of social life in Rockland and to have *entrée* within its doors was considered an enviable distinction. He was one of the most popular members of two of the wealthiest and most exclusive clubs in Rockland, one a bankers' club, the other a more widely social institution. But, in Rockland, as in Henley, the motive underlying every act was the same—self-glorification. In his courtesy to the guest in his home or in the brilliant after-dinner speech at a club-banquet, his first and only thought was of himself. “Egoism rampant!” was Mrs. Dick Hollinghead's terse comment, after a brief visit with her husband at Denning's home.

But it was not alone among the exclusive circles of the upper social and financial world that Denning fostered and nurtured his growing popularity. He gave, discreetly but generously, to charitable and philanthropic institutions; he interested himself in political and sociological questions; he urged concili-

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atory measures in the ever-increasing strife between labor and capital, and when, in one of the big strikes occurring in that State, he found himself elected as one of the arbitrators to adjust matters between employers and employed, he advocated such liberal concessions to the strikers, that the following day's issue of the socialistic paper characterized him as "the workingman's friend," to the amusement of the few who knew him best.

To outsiders, Denning's domestic life seemed peculiarly happy. To himself, looking on the public side, it was eminently satisfactory, but from a private side, something of a bore after the freedom and independence of club life. There could scarcely have been a woman better fitted to aid him in carrying out his plans for social supremacy than Mrs. Denning, and he appreciated this fact. Along this line they worked in perfect harmony; but beyond this, they had no interests in common. So remote were they in their individual lives that they knew little more regarding each other's real personality at the end of the first year of married life, than at the beginning. During the second year, however, a trifling incident revealed to Denning a phase of his wife's character which left a lasting impression upon his mind.

Returning home after a particularly wearisome day, he missed Helen's customary greeting; she was nowhere to be seen. Entering the hall he heard voices in the drawing room and ascertained from the butler that Mrs. Denning had company to dinner. He recognized the names of the guests as two members of the Art League—one of Mrs. Denning's "fads." He was tired enough that he would have

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been glad of an evening at home, but to listen throughout dinner to platitudes on art was too much to be expected.

"Say to Mrs. Denning that I have an engagement at the club this evening."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is Miss Helen?"

"In her apartments, I believe, sir."

With a feeling of irritation, Denning passed upstairs and went in search of Helen. She was not in her play room, but in response to his call, answered from the dainty bedroom beyond.

"Helen, are you sick?" he asked, hastening to the door, where he stopped in surprise. Upon the little bed, under the blue and white canopy, Helen, attired in a blue and white wrapper, sat enthroned among the pillows, surrounded by a court of dolls of all sizes, colors and conditions.

"Helen, what does this mean? Why aren't you downstairs?" he asked, going to the bed and bending over her.

She sprang into his arms and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Because mamma has sent me to bed to punish me; and papa, I wouldn't minded if I'd been naughty, but I haven't. Do you think that's fair, papa?" Her cheeks flushed and he could feel the slight form trembling. He sat down on the bed, holding her still in his arms.

"Tell me about it," he said.

"You know, papa, that day I went downtown with you and you took me to the candy shop and that cunning little ice cream parlor, and then to the club

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house to hear that beautiful little boy play the violin?"

"Yes."

"Well, I told mamma all about it, only I didn't say anything about going to the club house to hear the music, because, you know, she doesn't care for music like you and me. And, you know, that music was so beautiful it made me cry?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't you know, if it had been something that she liked, I could have told her about it, but I knew she would only laugh at me, and somehow, I didn't want to say anything about it, because you and I knew, and that was enough. But she found out about it some way and asked me to-day if you took me to the club house, and of course I told her you did. And then she said I had just the same as told her a lie that day I didn't tell her about it; because she said I had kept back the truth and deceived her. But I didn't mean to deceive her, and I don't deserve to be punished and it isn't fair!" she concluded, with more vehemence than he had ever heard her use, her lips quivering under the sense of outraged justice.

Denning's anger was roused, but he soothed and caressed the child.

"Wouldn't you enjoy having dinner with me, as well as going downstairs?" he asked.

"Ever so much more! It would be a great deal nicer, but I can't, you see, for mamma said I couldn't leave my bedroom and I must obey her."

"Well, we will have Lena bring a table in here and put it beside the bed, and you and the dolls can sit at one end and I'll sit at the other."

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"Oh, that will be nicest of all!—but mamma will expect you downstairs; she has company, you know."

"I think not;" Denning smiled at the recollection; "I left word with Parker that I was dining out to-night"

Near the close of the dainty repast, Helen lifted her brown eyes with a new apprehension dawning in them.

"I s'pose, papa," she said slowly, laying down her fork and gazing reflectively into Denning's face; "I s'pose I'll have to tell mamma all about this dinner, or she'll say I have deceived her again."

"I will explain to mamma about the dinner, Helen; and about the music, also," he replied gravely.

After bidding Helen good-night, Denning left the house by a side entrance and went downtown to his office in the bank, where he switched on the electrics, locked the door and sat down at his desk. Trivial as the incident was in itself, it had roused his anger more than anything which had occurred since his marriage. He was indignant at the injustice done Helen, irritated to find that his wife entertained such quixotic notions, but more than all, his anger was stirred by the suspicion of a lack of confidence in him on his wife's part; an unwillingness to trust the child to him without question.

On returning home, Denning went to his wife's sitting room before retiring to his own.

"You are home earlier than I expected," she remarked as he entered.

"I am tired to-night and feel the need of extra rest," he replied, taking a seat opposite her at the

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table by which she sat reading : "Did you have an enjoyable evening ?"

"Passably. I was sorry you had an engagement. Miss Landmer and Mr. Mowbray both left regrets that they did not meet you."

"Thanks ! I must confess I have no regrets in the matter," he replied coolly ; then with a slight change of tone, "I didn't meet Helen as usual, when I came home."

"She was in her room."

"I know ; I found her there."

"You were there ?"

"I was ; in fact, I took dinner with her."

"With Helen ! I thought you dined at the club."

"I expected to, but—changed my mind."

"Your 'engagement' could scarcely have been very important !"

"I have a standing engagement at the club whenever it suits my convenience to dine there. Regarding Helen, however ; don't you think, Marian, you were rather unjust ? What had that child done to deserve punishment ?"

"Didn't she tell you ? That she had deceived me ?"

"She told me you said something of the kind, but Marian, that is preposterous ! The child had no idea of deceiving you."

"Pardon me ; I dislike to contradict you, but I gave her the benefit of the doubt, thinking she might simply have forgotten to tell me of her visit to the club house ; until I questioned her closely and found that she had deliberately concealed the fact from me——"

"Not 'concealed' Marian ; withheld it, perhaps,

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because she thought you would not be interested to know it."

"Your fine distinctions, or her reasons, do not alter the facts. She intentionally withheld part of the truth, while giving me the impression she had told the whole truth. It was a small matter, but the principle involved is the same. It was the beginning of duplicity, and as such must be checked."

Denning's lip curled contemptuously, but his tones were even and calm: "That, I suppose, is the principle governing your own life; the whole truth on all occasions, with no reservations."

"It is the principle governing my life," she replied, with equal calmness, "in all relations where the whole truth is demanded. Reservations are to be expected between mere acquaintances or casual friends, but in the intimate relations of life—as between parent and child, or husband and wife—there should be no reservations."

"Like most theorists, you fail to live up to your theory. What do we—you and I—know of each other's daily life? You go your way and I go mine——"

"Do you wish it otherwise?"

"Most emphatically, no."

"I thought as much. I judged that manner of living to be your choice and have therefore followed it. But I can assure you there is nothing in my life, past or present, that you might not know to the minutest detail, if you wished. I, on my part, have no desire to question regarding your life. Much of it—perhaps, most of it—does not concern me. But," she hesitated an instant, then continued, calmly and

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dispassionately, "If I were to find that you had concealed—or 'withheld' I believe is your word—anything which did in any way concern me, as your wife, I would—" again she hesitated.

"Proceed ; I am interested."

"I would, of course, consider that you had deceived me," she concluded, quietly ignoring his irony.

"And would punish me accordingly, I suppose."

"No, I would not attempt that. I would simply withdraw altogether. I never give any one an opportunity to deceive me a second time."

"Thank you," said Denning, rising ; "I am glad to have such a perfect understanding between us. I shall reserve the right, however, to judge for myself as to what does, or does not, concern you."

He turned and leaning slightly forward, his hands on the back of the chair he had just vacated, he regarded her with a searching look.

"There is one other point I would like to have decided before I leave the room. Do you, or do you not, trust me implicitly as Helen's father?"

For a moment she seemed staggered by the question, and for the first time, Denning saw a faint color in her cheek. It angered him anew.

"Let us have a perfect understanding on this point," he said calmly, but in a tone she had never heard before. "Is Helen to be trusted to go and come with me, as any other child with its father, or is she to be under espionage ; subjected afterward to your inquisitions ; perhaps, as she grows older, chaperoned?" The last words he flung out with biting sarcasm.

Mrs. Denning rose slowly and confronted him.

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"Mr. Denning," she said, in a low, steady voice, "I consider the implication of your question an insult."

"And I consider the fact that I have to ask it, the fact that that child is compelled to give a detailed account of her little outings with me, an implied insult, of the worst kind, to myself."

Her eyes searched his face, but she made no reply.

"I regard that child the same as my own," he continued ; "and I demand whether or not I am to be regarded as her father?"

"Mr. Denning, did you marry me for the sake of my child?"

"I married you, if you will remember, with the express understanding that your child was to be as my own. Is that condition to be fulfilled, or not?"

The slight color had faded ; she looked pale instead.

"It is," she replied, a sort of apathy in her tone.

"Without any reservations?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. Good-night."

Denning went to his room assured that he had gained his point but with the perturbing consciousness of having made an unpleasant discovery. He felt the utmost contempt for his wife's views, nevertheless, he was annoyed. She was the kind of woman, he reflected, that wouldn't hesitate to make it deucedly awkward for a fellow if he failed to come up to her exalted standards. However, he congratulated himself, his affairs, past and present, were within his own keeping and she would have little opportunity for passing judgment upon them.

But Denning's perturbation after their interview, was slight compared with his wife's, whose pride had

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sustained a fearful blow in the humiliating discovery that in her husband's esteem she occupied but a secondary place, and even that, only by virtue of the deeper regard he had for her child. And to add to her humiliation, not even to herself could she accuse him of deceiving her in the matter. She had been self-deceived; blinded by her own pride. She had flattered herself, before their marriage, that his attentions to her child had been a subtle method of winning her approbation and esteem. There had been no assumption of love on either side, but, until to-night, she had believed herself secure in the highest place in her husband's regard, and the realization of her true position came upon her with crushing force.

But the same pride which had blinded her in the past, she summoned to her aid now;—no one, least of all, her husband, should know by word or look of hers, the discovery she had made—while her woman's wit speedily set to work to devise, if possible, some change in such an intolerable situation.

The third year of Denning's married life was marked by the advent of a son. Congratulations upon the auspicious event poured in upon the president of the North Western. Wine flowed in the private offices for the bank officials and their friends, while outside, cigars were dispensed to "all sorts and conditions of men" as they came and went in endless procession before the little grated windows.

As usual, Denning's view of the event was from a business, more than a sentimental, standpoint. When he took the small bundle of flannel and linen and lace into his arms, its living warmth against his breast;

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its vigorous though vague and uncertain movements; the faint breath on his cheek as he bent his head above it; the touch of the tiny, wrinkled hand that clung, with the tenacious grip of all helpless things, to his finger; all stirred within him sensations new and strange. That little morsel of humanity was a part of himself, its veins pulsating with his blood, its form throbbing with his life. At such times he felt a sort of subdued thrill of ecstasy. But usually, he thought of the new comer as his heir, his successor; another representative in the long line of Dennings,—men with jet-black hair, with keen, steel-blue eyes and steel-like natures, men born to plan and to execute—and in imagination, he saw him as a man, making good his own place in the financial world when he himself should have left it for the political arena; or later, should have retired with well-won honors.

His wife exulted as she saw his pride in his son. This child—his own flesh and blood—was, as she well knew, hers in a sense that Helen had never been. She believed him so impressed with her own personality that her husband, in loving his child, would love her likeness and unconsciously be drawn nearer to her, the prototype.

It seemed for a few weeks as though her anticipation might be realized. Denning showed his wife a new deference and gentleness; his pride in the child grew with its growth, while his affection for Helen continued unabated. Each child filled, in his thought, its own place; one, to minister to his enjoyment of the home life; the other, to be his representative in business life.

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Not until the babe was several weeks old and the subject of a name for him came under serious discussion, was there any break in these newer and pleasanter relations.

"I would like to name him for my father, Wilbur Kingsley," said Mrs. Denning, "but that, perhaps, would not be quite fair to you, so I thought of Kingsley Macavoy. We will have to call him Kingsley in either event, to avoid confusion."

Denning shot a quick, though smiling, glance at her, as he took the child from her :

"Thomas Macavoy, Jr., doesn't seem to have occurred to you."

"It is hardly necessary to bestow your full name on him, is it?"

"It's a good, old family name and naturally, I want my son to be as much of a reproduction of myself as possible."

"To be frank, I don't like the name," she answered ; "Imagine his being called 'Tommy' and 'Tom' ! I couldn't endure it."

Denning apparently did not hear her. He had carried the child to a window and was regarding it intently. Suddenly he exclaimed :

"Marian, this boy has black eyes !"

"Well," she replied nonchalantly, lifting her own dark eyes with a smile of amusement at the serious import of his tone ; "what else could you expect him to have?"

"Blue, of course. The males in our line all have blue eyes and black hair—like my own. A black-eyed Denning would be an anomaly."

"You could not possibly expect me to be aware of

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that," she answered, with a light laugh that angered him.

"The baby has its mother's eyes and hair, Mr. Denning," the nurse added, with pacific intent, as she left the room.

In his brief, hurried visits, Denning had not given these details his attention. Now, he noted for the first time the thick, closely curling brown hair and certain slight, but unmistakable, resemblances to his wife in the diminutive features.

In the swift revulsion of feeling which followed, he returned the child to his wife in silence, but there was that in his manner that made her recoil; her pride had received a second blow.

"It is to be regretted," she said, a touch of irony in her tone, "that your child is so unfortunate as to resemble its mother."

"It is no use to try to explain to you," he replied quietly; "you would not understand if I did; but I had hoped if ever I had a son, that he would be like me, as I am like my father."

"It is to be presumed then, that you would not wish him to bear the 'family name.'"

"No," he replied with decision, but ignoring her irony; "name him, as you wished, for your father, Wilbur Kingsley. He is far more of a Kingsley than a Denning," and he left the room.

XV

ANOTHER "RICHARDS EPISODE"

AT the close of the first decade in the life of the North Western National Bank, its reputation as one of the strongest institutions in the State had been established beyond the shadow of doubt. Its president had an equally well established reputation as a man of sterling business integrity, remarkable acumen and conservative business methods. Denning's methods in earlier life had been anything but conservative, but as conservatism was considered an essential when conducting business for the public, he was careful that his present methods should have a distinct flavor of that popular ingredient. In a way, Denning considered the bank's name and his own as nearly synonymous, with the result that as the former gradually acquired something of national repute, the latter was also beginning to be recognized in financial circles, West and East.

His social and domestic life continued much the same. Mrs. Denning was an acknowledged leader in society ; but individually, their lives were, if anything, farther apart. Helen, now a beautiful girl of fifteen, was the joy of his life outside of business ; not only his favorite, but his confidante, as well. He was fond of his boy, Kingsley, but found a constant source of disappointment in his increasing resemblance to his mother.

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Rockland had developed into a city of considerable importance. Denning, after careful investigation, finding the conditions propitious, believed the time had come for his next initiatory step and, through his lieutenants, announced himself as a candidate for mayor.

His name awoke at once the wildest enthusiasm in his own party and consternation throughout the ranks of the opposing party. He received the nomination by acclamation, and the other side put up its strongest man against him. There was a brief, hot campaign, followed by a close contest on election day, but Denning won by a good majority, and one of the first to congratulate him was his opponent at the polls.

One morning, a few weeks after his installation in office, while yet in the first flush of his victory, his secretary handed him the card of John P. Richards.

Denning seldom forgot a name or a face and this name he had especial cause to remember. As he was likely to be engaged for some time, he excused himself and stepped out into the large waiting room, where, seated a little apart from the usual crowd awaiting an audience with the mayor, he found Mr. Richards, looking scarcely older than when he had called upon him in Henley, eleven years before.

The latter arose with alacrity as Denning singled him out for a greeting.

"Well, well, Mr. Denning, how d'ye do? You see I've looked you up, as I said I would; but I swear, I didn't expect to find you here!"

"Very glad to see you Mr. Richards; it's very kind in you to look me up."

"And I've come," interposed Mr. Richards eagerly, "on the same errand as I came before—to congratulate

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you! You've cleared out and left all of us mining fellows way behind, but I don't bear any grudge against you for it. I'm proud of you, Mr. Denning; just as proud as though I'd had a hand in it myself—I only wish I had, by George!"

"Thank you; thank you very much, Mr. Richards, and now I want to inquire how long you are going to be in town?"

"Oh, I'm going out on the afternoon train; just stopped off to have a word or two with you, and look around a little."

"Well, Mr. Richards, I'm engaged at present with a committee on a matter regarding some franchises—will take about an hour—and then—" glancing about him—"I must see some of these people, of course; can you come in about eleven-thirty?"

"Yes, eleven-thirty or any time that suits you, Mr. Denning, and I'm much obliged."

As Denning sat apparently listening to the arguments for and against the granting of the franchises, his thoughts drifted backward to Mr. Richards' former visit and to the past which it recalled; that past which, at one time, he had vainly tried to forget, but which, since that interview, had gradually faded from his mind till now, as he recalled it, it seemed like a glimpse into some life other than his own. Now that it was dead and buried, he almost smiled as he recollected his old, haunting fears of it; he surely had been morbidly sensitive. It occurred to him that Mr. Richards had, unknowingly, had a hand in his later successes, for his words that day had given him a new lease of life, and with it, new ambitions and a new power to gratify them.

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Perhaps some slight sentiment of this sort would have led Denning to devote extra time and attention to Mr. Richards that day. Be that as it may, Fate had apparently so ordered it.

When Denning at eleven-thirty went again into the waiting room, to see if among the claimants still awaiting him, there were any with matters of particular importance, he found Mr. Richards, and seated beside him was Hollingshead.

"Hullo, Dick when did you get in?"

"About a couple of hours ago. I ran across Mr. Richards here, who said he had an appointment with you, so we came round together. Haven't seen you since election, you know, so I thought I'd make a verbal report this month and hand in my congratulations at the same time."

After answering a few questions and making appointments with others for the following day, Denning dismissed the remaining hangers-on, and ushered his guests into his office.

"Well, Mr. Richards, allow me to congratulate *you*," he said, as they seated themselves; "Mr. Hollingshead and I have aged a bit in these last few years, but you don't look a day older than when I saw you in Henley."

"That's because I've got to the top of the hill where I can stop and rest for a spell, while you fellows are still climbing," he answered, laughing.

"Is this your first trip West since then?" Denning inquired.

"Yes, my first. You see, about the time I was expecting to come out again, my wife's health failed and we went abroad for two or three years on her

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account. But that didn't help her ; she only lived about six months after we got back. From that time on, there's been one thing and another to keep me in the East, but I've settled everything up at last, and here I am, and here I mean to stay, for a while anyway. But now do tell me what you've been doing. I never was quite so cut up as when I got to Henley and found you wasn't there. Mr. Hollingshead here, told me where I'd find you, but I swear, if it don't beat all ! How did you ever happen to get into politics, Mr. Denning ? ”

“ I didn't ‘ happen ’ in, Mr. Richards ; I went in deliberately and shall probably remain in for the rest of my life. ”

“ I see, ” said Richards, with one of his shrewd looks. “ You've sort of made your *début* as mayor, but you'll appear in another rôle, as the play-bills say, before you leave the stage. Well, if I'm in the State, you'll get my vote every time, and I'm one that votes ‘ early and often, ’ ” he added with a laugh.

They went to lunch together, and after the details of Denning's recent victory, in which both his guests were interested, Hollingshead gave the latest news from Henley and the talk drifted to mines and mining. By the time they returned to the office, the conversation had become rather desultory, general rather than personal, and with the consciousness that the interview was drawing to a close, they seated themselves for the few minutes remaining, in the large waiting room. At a little distance from them was Denning's secretary ; others were coming and going, but as there was as yet no one waiting to see Denning, the latter sat smoking and listening indifferently to his guests.

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"Did I understand you to say that you expect to remain in the West?" Hollingshead inquired of Richards.

"Yes, for the next few years. I lived in New York because my wife and daughters liked it. Now, my wife is gone, the girls are married and my son is in business for himself; so there's nothing to keep me there any longer. New York's too lonesome for me. It may sound queer, but I'm lonelier jostling the crowds on Fifth Avenue or Wall Street, than I am in the mountains, with not a soul in sight."

"There's something in that," said Hollingshead; "I've been there, myself."

"After my home was broken up and before I'd got things settled I used to spend a good deal of my time down in Pennsylvania, with my brother, at Alton—that's where I was raised—and that reminds me," he continued, turning to Denning. "I got to talking with my brother one day about that family that you and I was speaking of when I saw you in Henley—the Heldts, you remember?"

Denning nodded, conscious of a sudden stricture in his throat.

"Well, you was right about there being a girl in the family, but she didn't live with her folks, and I guess father had forgotten about her when he told me the family had been wiped out by the fever. It only goes to show how a stranger will sometimes remember details about places and people that those who are familiar with them forget."

The room had grown dark to Denning, a darkness through which he saw the outlines of familiar objects, while red and white lights swam and danced before

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his eyes. His head whirled, but he remembered Hollingshead was listening, perhaps his secretary ; he must answer in such a way that they would suspect nothing, and yet, he must know the truth ! It seemed to him an eternity before he could find words to reply.

To Hollingshead, it seemed as though Denning hesitated a moment before replying, and he saw his face flush crimson, then suddenly grow pale.

“So the old man still has a living representative, has he? some one to perpetuate the race, if not the name.” Denning laughed lightly as he spoke and shook the ashes from his cigar.

“Yes, though from what I’ve heard, I guess neither she nor her boy take after the old man.”

Her boy ! Good God ! Had she got a divorce and remarried ? or——

Richards was again speaking in his easy, drawling tone, and the first words brought the cold sweat from Denning.

“It seems some twenty years or more ago, that a rich young fellow—my brother couldn’t recall his name—who had been hanging around there, married her—I guess it was a sort of marriage under duress—and then cleared out and left her. But he evidently squared it up with his conscience by leaving some money in the bank for her. And he was sharp enough to fix it so the old man couldn’t get hold of it—left it in trust till she came of age—and that made the old fellow go mad, he told the girl she’d have to pay for her keeping. But she wouldn’t use it for herself, she wanted to keep it for her child, so what does she do but leave home after the birth of the child and go

ANOTHER "RICHARDS EPISODE"

to Dayton—close by Alton—and take enough of the money to set up a little store—news-stand, cigars, candy, and so on—and goes into business. Well, you wouldn't think it maybe, but my brother said the little woman pulled through, paid back the money into the bank, established a good business and took care of herself and her boy, without using a cent of the money on herself, and only part of the interest for her boy. She said she was keeping it for him when he grew up."

"By Jove, she was plucky!" Hollingshead interposed.

"She must have been of a different breed from the rest of the family," Denning rejoined lightly, but his face was ashen and great drops stood on his forehead.

"Well, my brother says the old woman was pretty bright in her younger days, and she and the old man didn't hitch very well at that time and there was talk that the girl was of a different stripe from the rest of the family."

There was a question which Denning wanted to ask, but dared not. Hollingshead, for some reason, asked it for him.

"How did it all come out? Are they still prospering, or did the boy scatter the money to the winds when he came of age, the way they generally do?"

"I guess they are prospering all right. The boy was in school the last my brother knew of him and seemed a steady young chap."

The perspiration trickled slowly down Denning's face. He brushed it away hastily and sprang to his feet, thus drawing Mr. Richards' thoughts from his own talk.

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"What's the matter, Mr. Denning? Aren't you well? You look pretty white!" he exclaimed, rising from his chair.

"Nothing serious; just an attack of indigestion. I'll take a whiskey and soda. Come in and have something, gentlemen."

He led the way to his private office, encountering a stare of amazement on the face of his secretary and questioning glances from one or two who had heard Mr. Richards' exclamation. Going to a set of cupboards in the wall, he unlocked a pair of doors and opening them, set out wine, brandy, and whiskey for his guests to take their choice, while he hastily prepared a glass for himself. Hollingshead noting how his hands trembled, stationed himself between Mr. Richards and Denning, with his back to the latter.

A few minutes later, Denning, still pale, but steadied and braced by the stimulant, accompanied his guests to the door. Both he and Hollingshead were unusually cheerful.

"Very glad Mr. Richards, you are going to locate in the West. I hope to see you often."

"Thank you, sir; you probably will. Can't say yet just where I'll locate, but likely it will be in some mining locality. I ain't too old yet to know a good thing when I see it."

"I'll run in again, Mac, before I leave town; this evening—or to-morrow morning, perhaps you're engaged for the evening." Hollingshead looked at his watch as he spoke; somehow he could not bring his eyes to meet Denning's.

"No—yes, come to think, I have an engagement to-night. See you in the morning, Dick."

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As Denning returned to his private office, he again encountered his secretary's eyes, this time a faint smile in them.

"Feeling better, Mr. Denning? You looked bad there for a few minutes!"

"Yes, better, thank you. It was an uncommonly bad attack of indigestion. I ate a very hearty lunch. By the way, Meyers, I've got some important work on hand, I will be engaged all the afternoon."

Meyers bowed in assent and Denning entered his office and locked the door behind him.

His first act was to take another whiskey and soda. Then dropping into his chair, he folded his arms upon his desk and bowing his head upon them, groaned like a creature in mortal agony.

For a while he could not even think connectedly. He was like a person crushed beneath an overpowering weight, whose every movement only reveals anew his helplessness and adds to his torture. He was crushed beneath an overwhelming weight of shame, remorse, humiliation, fear; and each conscious thought only disclosed new cause for shame and terror, and wrung and tortured him anew.

At last, he sat up, gazing blankly before him as he tried to face the situation. He recalled how, but a few hours before, as he sat at that desk, the past had seemed to him like a bit of another man's life, or like a dream; now, that and the present seemed the only reality and all that had intervened appeared unreal. Oh, God! he thought, if only the last few years were but a dream, for in the light of what he had heard, they were the more terrible reality of the two. He thought of his marriage—void in the eyes of the law;

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of his wife—a wife in name only, the unconscious victim of the basest fraud that could be perpetrated on a woman ; of his children—his son branded as illegitimate, and Helen, loving, trustful, dear to him as his own, she too, so long as she was supposed his child, would bear the same stigma, should the truth become known. Denning suddenly felt that he was growing mad.

He sprang to his feet. Come what might, he must get control of himself : he must stop this awful torrent of thought surging through his brain, and he knew of but one way to do it. Going hastily to the cupboard, he drank deeply ; then sinking upon a couch near by, sank soon into a heavy sleep.

XVI

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES

WHEN Denning awoke, the last rays of the setting sun were lying across his desk ; they faded even while his eyes rested on them with a dull, perplexed stare. The utter silence of the building oppressed him ; he gazed about him in bewilderment, till the sight of the open cupboard recalled his last conscious act, and with it the memory of all that preceded it. For an instant he felt the crushing weight again, but he had, in a measure, recovered his grip on himself and would not go down under it.

The sound of the janitor unlocking the door to the outer room recalled him to the hour. He rose, closed and locked the cupboard, shut his desk, released the inner lock to the office door so that the janitor might enter, and taking his hat and coat, slipped quietly out through a side door, into the corridor. He was the only passenger in the elevator, but on catching sight of his own face in the mirror, he recoiled as from a stranger, not recognizing the drawn, haggard features, the sunken eyes encircled by dark shadows.

Pulling his hat over his eyes, he hurried to his favorite club, meeting few acquaintances on the way, for the people thronging the streets at that hour were not of his set. Going directly to his apartments, he took a bath, finishing with a cold shower, then ordered

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dinner served in his sitting room. He ate little, but drank three cups of black coffee ; then tossing a liberal fee to the waiter, said :

“ You and Brown divide that between you, and if any one inquires for me, I’m not in. I don’t wish to be disturbed.”

Then taking the pipe to which he always resorted in the crises of his career, he sat down to calmly face the new situation and its complications. And his first thought was of his lawful wife, Millicent Denning. For the first time in his life, a feeling of respect mingled with the anger which the thought of her always evoked. In the very fidelity to him which angered him, in the assertion and maintenance of her own rights against Heldt’s greed, in her safe-guarding for her child the money left for herself, he saw revealed a moral sense and a strength of character which he would not have believed she possessed. That she, ignorant, unsophisticated, childish, as she had appeared, had succeeded in establishing a business, however humble, that enabled her to support herself and child, leaving untouched the sum he had provided for her, appealed to his business instinct and won his approbation even while his anger toward her burned more fiercely than ever before ; for to her failure to obtain a divorce, he laid the entire responsibility for the present situation. If she and her child—*his* child ! Strangely enough, the thought had not occurred to him ! His first-born son—no—he writhed at the thought—his only legitimate son !

Denning began to count the years backward ; nearly eleven years in Rockland, three in Henley, ten in South America,—he had a son nearly twenty-three

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years old ! What would he be like ? he wondered. Would he resemble the Dennings, or old Heldt and his sons ? He recalled Richards' hint regarding Millicent's birth and, with a bitter realization that he had stooped even lower than he had supposed, dismissed the subject.

The next hour he devoted to a consideration of the present in its bearing upon the future. At the end of that time he had decided that there was nothing for him to do but continue in the same course which he had marked out for himself. To depart from that in any direction would only be likely to precipitate the very catastrophe he wished to avoid. The only course was to let sleeping dogs lie. Millicent probably thought him dead by this time. To try to secure a divorce himself would only bring the whole story into more or less publicity for nothing ; for he well knew a divorce, if secured, would be of no avail with Marian. No, there was no other way but to go on, with the consciousness of the sword suspended over his head. When the blow fell, it would blot out his home, ruin his social position, undermine his financial standing and blast his political hopes. But, perhaps Fate would be merciful—who could tell ?—and he had already won too much to cast it aside.

It was nearly midnight when he reached home. He was astonished when he suddenly found himself creeping, like a thief, noiselessly and stealthily up the stairs.

“ Good God ! ” he muttered, “ A coward already and in my own house ! ” and assuming his usual step, he passed through the hall to his sitting room. A fire was burning in the grate. Denning switched on the electric light and drawing a large chair before the fire,

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sank wearily into it ; leaning his elbows on his knees and his head on his hands, he gazed blankly and gloomily before him. Sitting thus, he heard a light, familiar knock. He lifted his head and in response to his "Come in" Helen entered. She wore a white cashmere wrapper and her waving golden hair was loosely braided, while stray, curling locks formed a faint aureole about her face.

Denning did not turn his head or speak, but when she came over to him and slipping an arm about his neck, bent over him, so completely did he trust this child-woman, that he looked into the trustful, loving brown eyes unflinchingly, as he could have looked into no other eyes that night.

The playful greeting she would have given him died on her lips.

"Daddy dear ! You are not well to-night. What is the matter ?"

"I am not unwell, Helen ; only very tired. I have had a hard day."

"Poor boy !" she murmured, drawing his head against her with true maternal instinct, while her fingers wandered caressingly through his hair.

For a few moments neither spoke, for Helen, with her womanly wise ways, knew by a sort of intuition that he did not wish to talk.

After a while he said : "This is rather late for you, isn't it, Helen ?"

"I suppose it must be, though I've been reading and got so interested I've no idea what time it is. You see I thought you might be late to-night and I read to keep awake till you came."

"Why did you think I would be late ?"

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"I met Uncle Dick downtown this afternoon, and when I asked him if he were not coming up to dinner with you, he said he didn't expect to see you till to-morrow, as he believed you would be engaged all the evening."

"Yes, I told him I had an engagement."

"I tried to get him to come home with me to dinner, but I couldn't coax him. I thought he seemed worried about something."

For the first time, Denning wondered how much of the real state of affairs Hollingshead suspected.

"Well, little one,"—unconsciously he used the old term of endearment of her childish days—"I must not keep you any longer ; you are losing your beauty sleep, you know."

"I don't think it will make any perceptible difference," she laughed, bending over him for a good-night kiss.

He kissed her with more than usual warmth, and again the brown eyes scanned his face.

"Papa mine," she spoke with quaint seriousness, "you are more than tired to-night ; you are worried."

Denning had never attempted to deceive or evade Helen. She was so truthful herself, so unswerving in her loyalty to him and her confidence in him, that concealment or subterfuge was impossible, and became more and more an impossibility as she advanced towards womanhood. So now he replied :

"Yes, Helen, I am worried to-night. All business men have their worries sometimes."

"I am sorry," she said simply ; "I hope it will come out all right."

"God knows I hope so !" he exclaimed, and there

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was that in his tone which made her regard him with half-fearful wonder.

Suddenly, moved by an inexplicable impulse, he rose and drawing her to him, held the golden head against his breast as though it helped assuage the pain at his heart.

"Helen, my child, I have tried to be a good father to you, but I may have made mistakes—we are all liable to. If the time ever comes, Helen, that people turn against your father and say he has done wrong, remember that he loved you and did what he thought was right, and don't let them turn you from him."

The woman in her responded at once to his appeal.

"Turn me from you, papa!" she exclaimed, "I would stand by you if all the world turned against you. Nobody," she added impetuously, throwing her arms about his neck, "nobody—not mamma herself—could turn me from you."

"Why did you say that?" he asked in surprise, for she had given expression to the thought in his own mind.

"Because you spoke as though you might be accused of wrong doing when you believed you had done right, and in that case, perhaps,—well, it might be doubtful which side mamma would take, but"—she smiled brightly into his face—"there wouldn't be any doubt, you know, where I'd be."

Only a little thing, but it was the first ray of light in the darkness; a thread of gold that led the hopeful side of the man's nature to reassert itself. He held her close for a moment in silence; then, as he released her, he said:

"Perhaps we will never need to recall this—we will

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hope so—but I know you will not forget. Good-night.”

When she had gone, he sat trying to conjecture how much, if any, of his secret had been guessed by the three present when Richards told his story. Richards himself he felt had no suspicion of the truth. He was rather slow, self-absorbed, not quickly susceptible to impressions from the outside. But one thing Denning determined upon ; Richards must be kept in the West ; he wanted no gossip concerning himself retailed in Alton, calling forth some incidental recognition of his name to forge a link between the past and present.

Regarding Meyers, his secretary, he felt less assured. He was a comparatively recent acquaintance, a man who had been useful in the campaign ; a small, secretive, non-committal man, of sallow complexion and uncertain age ; usually silent, but who could, as occasion required, talk for an indefinite length of time without saying anything, or say much, with little or no talk. His stare, as Denning passed him for a whiskey and soda, and his faint smile afterward might mean everything or nothing. At all events, he was a man to be handled judiciously, and Denning had little doubt of his own abilities in that direction.

The more he recalled of Hollingshead's manner, the more convinced Denning became that he had comprehended the truth of the situation. He felt intuitively the sympathy of the big, honest-hearted fellow who had never yet failed him, and there came to Denning for a moment, a responsive impulse to throw himself upon that sympathy and take his old chum into his confidence, but his pride throttled it.

Meanwhile, alone in his room at the “Hotel Rockland,”—the first night he had spent in Rockland except

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as Denning's guest, but the latter in his self-absorption had not thought of that—Hollingshead was sadly going over the story which he had pieced together from memory.

He had been paying little attention to what Richards was saying, until Denning's white, beaded face and haunted eyes recalled the night in Shasta. It was the same look, only intensified, the apprehension and dread of that night merged into actual terror; as though he saw now what then he had feared to see. Suddenly the significance of Richards' story had flashed upon Hollingshead. He had been stunned, staggered; but he had seen Denning's desperate effort to gather himself, to keep up appearances, and his only thought had been to help him.

But in the solitude of his room, he had had time to look his discovery full in the face, and gradually its features assumed a sickening familiarity. The change in Denning after his sojourn in the mountains; his avoidance of old scenes and associates on his return from South America; his appearance that night at Shasta; his years of close application to business; his elation after Richards' former visit, his marriage and the changes that followed;—all that had seemed mysterious or contradictory was now explained by this story of Richards' and corroborated it.

It was an ugly situation, he told himself, particularly for a man in Denning's position; and then the nonchalant, ease-loving Hollingshead, who had never known an hour of thought or care for himself, walked the room till past midnight, revolving all manner of plans for his friend's relief. At last his face brightened, his steps slackened, then stopped altogether.

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“By Jove! I’ve got it,” he soliloquized, “That’s the scheme. Situated as he is, he can’t make a move. He can’t do anything here, and if he went east, every one would think it had to do with business or politics and it would be in the papers, so people would be more or less on the look out. But no one pays any attention to what I do. It’s a good thing sometimes to be a person of no consequence. Gad, but I’m tired! Three hours!”—looking at his watch—“and the hardest three hours’ work I ever did in my life; experting mines wasn’t in it with that sort of work!”

Hollingshead went to sleep assuring himself that he could extricate Denning from his difficulties “like a fairy godmother.” He was no less firm in his conviction the following morning and with serene, unshaken confidence, partook of a substantial breakfast. Not until he was nearing Denning’s office did he feel any misgiving, and then his doubts were not of himself, but of Denning. It was so long since there had been anything like the old, frank, confidential relations between them. Would Denning try to ignore the events of the preceding day as he had ignored that night at Shasta? As Hollingshead sat once more in the waiting-room, his surroundings bringing the occurrence yet more vividly to mind, it seemed impossible.

It was with quickened pulse and heightened color that he rose and approached the private office when his name was called.

“Hello, Dick! Good morning. Sorry I couldn’t see you last evening, but business is business, you know.”

Hollingshead gazed at Denning in astonishment as the latter met him with an unconcerned smile. He

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was a trifle paler than usual, but there was nothing in look or tone to tell of the mental strain through which he had passed. Hollingshead felt repulsed, and was both hurt and angered.

"Keep your excuses for outsiders, Mac," he answered shortly; "they're not needed between us."

If Denning felt the thrust, he gave no sign.

For half an hour they talked briskly of business. Perhaps a more critical observer than Hollingshead might have detected a shade of defiance in Denning's eyes, a touch of bravado in voice and smile. At last, in conclusion, after speaking of Richards' desire to locate in the West, he said :

"Try and get him interested in some of your properties, Dick. Get him to settle in Henley if you can, he would be a good man for the place."

"Yes, and Henley would be a good place for the man," the other rejoined dryly, rising as he saw the conference was ended; "Is that all, Mac?"

"Yes, I believe so. Are you going back to-day?"

"On the two-fifteen."

"Sorry, Dick, that you couldn't come up to the house on this trip. Helen was speaking of you last night."

Hollingshead, battling silently between wounded pride and his affection for his old chum, made no reply, for he had not heard.

He turned, facing Denning, his hands thrust in his pockets, his shoulders thrown aggressively forward.

"Macavoy Denning," he said, with brusque determination, "even if you've nothing more to say to me this morning, I've something to say to you."

Denning's glance wavered and fell.

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"I've been your friend, Mac, for more than twenty-five years, and in the old days when you trusted me, I pulled you out of many a hole ; and I'm too much of a friend to you yet to see you in the hole you're in now and not want to pull you out. I admire your 'nerve'—on others ; it won't 'go' with me."

Denning's face grew white : "For God's sake, Dick, stop ! I can't bear it."

"You will have to bear it. There's been enough of silence ; too much. If there had been less of it, you wouldn't be where you are now. It's this cursed affair that has come between us, from the time you came back from your stay in the mountains, and has forced us further and further apart, year by year, and this is the result."

"Don't reproach me, Hollingshead," Denning cried piteously ; "Good God ! haven't I enough to bear without your adding to it ? Can't you see for yourself that I couldn't speak of this, even to you ?"

"You couldn't ! Did I ever go back on you, Mac, or give you away ?"

"Never, Dick ; but——"

"And if you had trusted me with this affair when you came back from the mountains—or even on our return from South America—I'd have pulled you through in good shape and prevented all this. Good heavens, Mac ! I'd have made a special trip home from South America and got a divorce for you."

"I don't doubt it. I don't deny that I took the wrong course in not coming to you in the first place, but there's no use going back to it ; that's all past, it won't help the situation now."

"Yes, there is use in going back to it, if you'll

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only learn from the past not to let your own pig-headedness stand in the way of a friend's helping you."

"But there is no help as the case stands now, Hollingshead, and there's no use talking about it. It will only——"

"Wait till you hear what I have to say," he interposed, almost sternly.

Denning rose and quietly locked the door into the waiting room ; then resumed his seat. Hollingshead remained standing, one elbow resting on the desk at his side, the other hand still in his pocket.

"As I said a while ago, Mac, I'm too much your friend to see you where you are and go back without an effort to help you. I staid up half the night studying over the matter. I know it's the worst hole you ever got into—about the worst a man could get into—but I'll pull you out yet, if you'll let me, and no one, not even my wife, will be the wiser."

Denning shook his head : "Don't think that I don't appreciate your kindness, Hollingshead ; I do. But I've looked the matter over from every standpoint and there is absolutely nothing that I, or you, or any one, can do. There is nothing to be done ; there is no use even talking about it."

"Mac," Hollingshead pleaded, "listen to me. I understand well enough that you can do nothing, for obvious reasons. But what is to prevent my going east, finding that woman and securing a divorce for you ?"

"And then—providing, of course, you succeeded in securing it—I suppose you imagine the rest would be easy ?" Denning said with a bitter smile.

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"It would rest between you and your—between you and Mrs. Denning. You could easily go away and be quietly married ; either somewhere among strangers, or privately among friends."

Denning again shook his head, but with increased bitterness :

"A divorce, if you got it for me, would do me no good, Hollingshead."

"What do you mean, Mac?"

"I mean that Mrs. Denning—Marian—is opposed to divorces and no power on earth would induce her to go against what she calls her 'convictions.'"

"Convictions be—hanged ! She'd sacrifice her convictions to conventionality, in this case."

"That's where you're wrong ; she would sacrifice me and my prospects first. Dick Hollingshead, laying aside the question of divorce, do you think that woman would marry me knowing this affair ? You don't know her, if you do !"

"Heavens, Mac ! she must, for the sake of the children—the boy."

"She might go through the ceremony for the boy's sake, to legitimize him, but she would never live with me, or allow the children to ; think what that would mean to a man in my position ! I tell you, Hollingshead, there's no use talking. It's not to be thought of."

"But think of the risk you run in continuing this sort of life : on the one hand, the whole thing is likely to come out some day, like a thunder clap out of a clear sky ; on the other hand, suppose you were to die suddenly and an investigation be made, where would your wife and children be ?"

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“I know, I know ; I’ve looked at the matter from every side. Here’s the whole thing in a nutshell ; it’s a risk, as you say, on one side, and a dead certainty of misfortune and failure on the other, and I’m going to take the risk. It’s like this, Hollingshead : the sword is there, suspended over me ; whenever it falls—if it does—it means death ; but there’s a bare possibility that it may not fall, and so long as there is, I’d be a fool to pull it down on my own head.”

Without another word, Hollingshead turned and taking his hat, prepared to leave the room. Denning rose hastily.

“Here, Dick, don’t leave that way. I thank you for what you wanted to do. I won’t forget it, you know.”

Hollingshead took the proffered hand : “Mac, I don’t like the course you’re taking, but all the same I’m your friend. If the time ever comes that I can help you—or that you need me—let me know. I’ll be there.”

XVII

A KNIGHT ERRANT

"I'm sorry, Miss, but I don't think we can make Chicago in time for the 'Limited.' That leaves Chicago at nine-fifteen and we're forty-five minutes behind time ; so there's no use in your telegraphing for a berth."

"Is there no possibility of your making up time so as to make the connection?"

"Hardly ; we shall do the best we can, but it isn't likely we'll pull into Chicago before nine-five, and I doubt if you could make the transfer in that time."

"Is there another train out of Chicago to-night that will get me into St. Paul in time for the west-bound express?"

"You are going through to the coast?"

"Yes."

"Let me see ; you take the nine-twenty-five at St. Paul. Yes, you can take the ten-twenty train to-night ; that will get you into St. Paul in time, and not being so crowded as the 'Limited' you will have no difficulty in getting a berth aboard the train."

"Thank you."

The conductor went on his way and his fair interlocutor sank back in her chair with a little sigh of resignation.

She was a beautiful girl of twenty-one or -two ; tall, slender, with a skin of ivory white which heightened

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the vivid scarlet of her lips and intensified the blue tracery of veins in her temples and the rose flush of her cheeks. Her finely moulded hands were of the same ivory tint with delicate blue veins and finger tips resembling rose petals. An unusually firm but sweet mouth gave to her face, in repose, a dignity beyond her years, but the eyes—the laughing, loving, trustful brown eyes—and the rebellious, wavy, golden hair were still those of the little maiden whom Denning had met at Hampton Springs some sixteen years before.

Helen Denning had graduated from an Eastern school the preceding year and was now returning from a visit at the home of her college chum. The day's ride had been monotonous and wearisome and she was glad when, an hour or two later, they came out upon the broad, level plain across which the train would make its "home run" to Chicago.

Idly she watched the distant trains speeding from all points of the compass towards a common goal, their courses almost imperceptibly converging like the spokes of an enormous wheel towards its hub. Gradually the twilight deepened till she could only distinguish them by their lights, as they crawled, like fiery serpents, through the dusky gloom. Then, save for an occasional glimpse of twinkling lights, they disappeared, one by one, swallowed up in the darkness; all but one, which grew brighter and more distinct.

She watched it listlessly till, suddenly aware that the other passengers were interested in it and noting their own increased speed, she discovered that the two trains were racing and her interest was thoroughly aroused.

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On and on rushed the trains at constantly accelerating speed, the rival sometimes slightly in the lead, then falling slightly to the rear, the convergency of their lines drawing them nearer to each other. Men were betting, women were laughing and waving handkerchiefs and newspapers through hastily opened windows, while from the windows of the rival train could be seen similar demonstrations.

Both trains rushed onward at terrific speed but neither gained perceptibly on the other till, like some sentient creature, their own train seemed suddenly to gather itself for a final effort. A shuddering vibration was felt, silencing the laughter as a thrill of apprehension swept through the crowd; but the next instant a prolonged cheer burst forth as their train was seen to be steadily pulling away from its rival. For a few moments it continued to plunge along, rocking and swaying from side to side; then lights began to flash ahead and the train slackened to its normal speed; they were approaching the outskirts of Chicago.

As the result of this rivalry, Helen caught the "Limited." It was moving out of the station as she followed the porter into the sleeper. He deposited her travelling bags in the aisle and indicated a vacant seat beside a woman in a section piled high with luggage, which she took, ignoring the woman's supercilious stare and speculating regarding her own prospects for the night. They did not appear flattering. Every section was occupied and the usual number of women in various stages of dishabille were staggering down the aisle, clutching whatever came in their way in their frantic efforts to maintain their equilibrium. Men were sauntering in from the smoker, dropping

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into available corners to read their papers or doze while waiting for their berths to be made ready. She was roused from her thoughts by the conductor who suddenly paused beside her.

"Tickets," he said gruffly.

"I had no opportunity to get a ticket, our train was so late," she replied, opening her purse, "can you give me a desirable berth?"

"You'll have to take what you can get. There's nothing left but upper berths, and only three of them."

"An upper berth!" she exclaimed in dismay, "I wouldn't take an upper berth under any consideration."

"If you wanted a lower berth you should have telegraphed ahead," he replied shortly.

"But I've told you our train was so late we had no hope of making connection. The conductor told me there was no use in telegraphing."

"I've nothing to do about that. Do you want a berth?"

"I'll take a stateroom."

"Staterooms are taken. You'll have to take an upper berth or nothing. Several ladies have taken upper berths to-night."

The discussion was attracting the attention of those about her. She was conscious that a gentleman had paused for an instant in the aisle and then passed on. The conductor was so rude and offensive that Helen felt humiliated, embarrassed.

"Send the porter to take my luggage into one of the day coaches," she said coldly.

"The coaches are crowded; you'll find them very

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uncomfortable. An upper berth is usually considered preferable to sitting up all night."

His sneer was insufferable ; her cheeks flamed.

"You heard my orders."

He turned abruptly, without speaking ; some one further down the aisle was signalling to him and he left her.

She ignored the curious glances cast in her direction while she waited for the porter. It was the conductor who again appeared.

"You can have a lower berth," he said ; "the gentleman in number nine will vacate and take an upper berth himself."

His manner of communicating another's kindness was so offensive that she felt even more humiliated. Her eyes flashed as she answered coldly and clearly :

"I'll not deprive the gentleman of his berth ; send the porter as I ordered."

"I will consider it a favor if you will occupy number nine," said a voice over the conductor's shoulder. The tone was low, but possessed a sympathetic, pleasing quality. She looked into the face and recognized the speaker as the gentleman who had stopped in passing a few minutes earlier. The conductor stepped aside and he came nearer.

"I understand your predicament," he said, smiling slightly, "for I came near being in the same myself. My train was so late it was doubtful about making the connection, but I took the benefit of the doubt. Won't you favor me by following my suggestion?"

She smiled, his dark eyes seeming to hold hers by a sort of spell : "It seems like taking a base advantage of you," she replied.

"Not at all. I shall be in the smoker till a late

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hour, and it is out of the question for you to think of spending the night in one of the coaches."

"I thank you very much," she said slowly, conscious that the smoker had been invented for the occasion.

"And I thank you. Good night," he answered, so low the words could not reach the conductor's ears, and was gone before she could say more.

The following morning, Helen found her impressions concerning her "knight errant"—as she mentally designated him—elusive and vague. She recalled only a pale face with dark hair and eyes, the latter seeming to possess an unusual power of attraction, though she could not now determine wherein it lay. She was naturally desirous to meet him again, but he did not appear until they were nearing St. Paul. Amid the confusion incident to the arrival of a train at its terminus, he entered, newspaper in hand, and stopping near his luggage which had been placed in a newly vacated section, stood quietly reading while the porter plied his whisk broom and brushes. She improved the time to observe him closely. His face was smooth shaven and white, with the blue-black shade on cheek and chin which indicates a naturally heavy beard. His hair was of the same blue-black tint; thick, but fine and straight. He was tall, well built, with a bearing that indicated self-reliance and a strong individuality. He dismissed the porter with a fee, then glancing in Helen's direction and catching her look of recognition, he lifted his hat and came forward with a smile.

"I hope you rested well," he said.

"Very well, thanks to your courtesy."

"Please don't mention it."

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"But I must, you know, for I know I was not properly grateful last night ; that conductor had exasperated me so."

He smiled at some recollection. "There is no need for thanks ; it was a pleasure for me, but one which I think you made me come near losing. I really believe you would have refused my suggestion if I had not intervened personally."

"Quite likely ; it was awfully childish of me, but coming through him, after all his rudeness, I couldn't accept it. It seemed quite another thing when you made it."

"I appreciated your feelings and that is my apology for what might otherwise have seemed impertinent."

"No apology is needed on your part," she assured him.

He was looking into her face as he spoke ; something there held his gaze longer than he was aware, and again she felt the peculiarly attractive power of his eyes. They too, were dark with the same elusive blue shade ; a deep steel-blue, clear, penetrating, but with a light in them that softened their glance and that diffused itself through his face as he spoke or smiled.

Meanwhile, the train had slackened ; the porter was hurrying forward the luggage, and with a courteous salute, but with something like regret in his eyes, the stranger left her and passed out of the car.

A moment later she followed leisurely, with a faint, undefined sense of disappointment, trying to recall a quotation regarding "Ships that pass in the night" and pensively reflecting that "he would have been such a delightful travelling companion."

Several hours later, Helen, seated in one of the

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Pullman coaches in the long train of the west-bound express, found the time beginning to drag heavily. There were comparatively few passengers in the sleeper, though a number of seats were filled with coats and bags, the owners of which had not yet appeared. She noted idly in the seat across the aisle a suit-case with the initials T. M. D., the same as her father's ; then straightway forgot it. She skimmed through a newspaper from the coast. Among its political items she found a paragraph concerning her father and his probable nomination for governor of his State, and for a while thereafter, she sat, girl-like, absorbed in day dreams of the future in the event of his election.

They would have to move to the capital, of course. She was already familiar with the town, having spent several weeks there during the seasons of the legislature while her father had served as State senator. She recalled the gubernatorial mansion on the hill where she had frequently been a guest ; it was not nearly so pleasant as their home in Rockland, but it would mean still higher success for her father, for he had confided to her his plans and she knew that he had consented to accept the nomination for governor only upon the condition that at the next session of the State legislature he was to be elected United States senator. He regarded it as practically "settled ;" a "sure thing" once he was elected governor, and Helen found herself looking forward to life in Washington—less than two years away, in all probability—with pleasant anticipations.

But at length even those air castles palled. She drew a book from one of her bags and began to read,

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but the motion of the car combined with the monotonous rhythm of the wheels made her drowsy ; her head gradually sank upon the pillow, till she fell asleep, one hand beneath her cheek, the other still resting on the open page of the book in her lap.

She made a charming picture ; the slightly dishevelled golden hair curling about her ears and temples, and the long lashes of the same hue resting on the flushed cheeks. There were a number who, as they passed, regarded her smilingly ; there was one who paused in sheer astonishment, his face lighting with genuine pleasure ; who after a lingering glance, seated himself across the aisle, discreetly turning his back toward the fair sleeper.

When Helen awoke, the train had entered upon the open, rolling prairie and the lengthened shadows falling athwart the plain told that it was late in the afternoon. With sundry pats and pulls, she deftly adjusted hair and gown, at the same time taking mental notes of her surroundings. The back, so pronouncedly turned toward her, at once arrested her attention. There was something half familiar in the broad, square shoulders, in the poise of the head and in that sloe-black hair. She glanced about the car, noting indifferently the changes that had taken place, but drawn by some inexplicable attraction, her eyes returned again and again to the figure across the aisle, each time with an increasing sense of familiarity. Could it be?—she wondered ; it couldn't, of course, and yet——

She reopened her book, but did not become so absorbed in it as to be utterly regardless of her neighbor's movements. A sidelong glance at his profile, as he

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bent forward to re-arrange his coat and suit-case, satisfied her as to his identity, and a few moments later, when he moved to the opposite seat, facing her, their eyes met in a smile of mutual recognition, in which there was evident pleasure on both sides, but no trace of surprise.

Supper was announced soon, and on their return from the dining car they chatted pleasantly for an hour or so. Helen found him an agreeable talker, but rather reserved, and though she secretly hoped to renew the acquaintance the next morning, she felt slight curiosity as to what he would do and left the initiative to him.

It was soon evident that he had no intention of taking advantage of their incidental meeting on the "Limited" to force his acquaintance upon her; but to a young lady of penetration and discernment, it was equally evident that his reserve was not due to indifference. He was only "biding his time," and with secret amusement, Helen quietly watched and waited. Meantime, she found herself studying his face with an increasingly perplexed sense of familiarity in its lines, when in repose; yet faint, elusive, vanishing the instant that he spoke or smiled. And not infrequently she found his eyes fixed upon her face, but with an almost reminiscent look that saved his gaze from anything like discourtesy.

At noon of the second day, as the train was winding its way upward through the mountain ranges, he entered the dining car while Helen was at dinner, and seeing her seated alone, came over to her table with a smile that sought and obtained permission to be her *vis-à-vis*.

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"This serves to break the monotony to a certain extent," he said, taking the menu handed him by the waiter, but looking at Helen ; "I imagine it is more *ennui* than hunger that drives the majority of us to the dining car."

"Then I must be in the minority," she laughed, "for I am positively hungry."

"I wish I might say the same," he rejoined, glancing indifferently through the card in his hand.

In the uncompromising light of noonday and with only the width of the table between them, Helen discovered the man opposite her to be older than she had at first supposed. He looked to be about thirty and certain preconceptions she had formed regarding him, underwent a slight modification.

Having given his order, his eyes again sought hers, with their grave, slow smile, which nevertheless lighted his face, rendering it attractive, but dispelling the haunting sense of familiarity.

"I looked in upon you once this morning," he said, "intending to ask if you would care to go back into the observation car, but you were so absorbed in a book I concluded not to interrupt."

"Oh, but the book would keep, you know!" she exclaimed, genuine regret in her tone.

"So will the scenic attractions, at our present rate of speed," he retorted, laughing ; "one break-down and three hot boxes so far to-day. We're nearly four hours behind time already ; we'll be a week getting through at this rate."

"But we will make up lost time on the other side of the range ; down-grade, you know. Are you going through to the coast ?"

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"I am," he replied, with the least possible hesitation.

Helen was on the point of saying, "So am I," and naming her destination, but the slight reserve with which he had answered her query, checked her and she changed the subject.

At his suggestion, on leaving the table, they made their way to the rear platform of the observation car, where he arranged a comfortable seat for Helen, taking the outer and more exposed position himself.

Under the spell of the gray peaks towering majestically about them, sometimes graciously bending above them as they passed and always turning their faces of calm, solemn beauty toward them, they were drawn by a subtle bond nearer to each other. Their talk was impersonal,—Helen thought she detected on his part a studied avoidance of personal subjects—yet each felt irresistibly attracted toward the other by an inexplicable tie which seemed to come from the shadowy past.

The following day found them on the other side of the range, where, as Helen had predicted, it soon became evident that an effort was being made to recover lost time. They had, after breakfast, gone once more to the rear platform of the observation car, to take a farewell look at the mountains, now extending above and behind them, and the rolling and pitching of the car, as it bounded from side to side of the constantly winding road, grew more noticeable, moment by moment.

They sat for a while, gazing silently upon the peaks rapidly receding in the distance.

"Do you know," said Helen, breaking the silence

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at last, "I can't realize that we are leaving them it seems as though they were drawing away from us."

"I have the same impression," her companion replied, "it is an optical illusion of frequent occurrence on railroad trains."

She shook her head with a little frown: "Now why do you spoil my poetic fancies with anything so prosaic as that? Look at them in their sombre robes, like a company of monks, silent and solemn, worshipful. Yesterday they came out to meet us and their grim faces relaxed into smiles as they bent over us in welcome. Now, they are bidding us farewell and going back to their splendid isolation. I can almost see them crossing themselves under their gray cloaks."

A sudden lurch of the car would have thrown her to the floor as she finished speaking, had not her companion caught and steadied her.

"A very pretty conceit," he answered, smiling, "but I would suggest moving to a safer place before you weave any more fancies."

"Oh, I was only carried away by the fervor of my imagination," she laughed, but another roll in the opposite direction seconded his suggestion so forcibly that Helen made no further demur.

"We can have almost as good a view here," she said, when he had closed the door after stepping within the car.

"Pardon me," he laid a detaining hand on her shoulder as she was about to seat herself, "I think we had better return to our own car. I don't consider this safe."

She regarded him with frank amazement: "Why,

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what possible danger can there be here ? ” she exclaimed incredulously.

“ I will explain later,” he replied, with one of his grave smiles ; but it was the look in his eyes that she obeyed, more than his words or the gently impelling pressure of his hand on her shoulder, as she turned and passed silently forward while he followed closely, steadying her as the train rocked and swayed from side to side. Two cars intervened between the observation car and their own. When Helen at last sank, staggering, into her seat, she exclaimed with a sigh of relief :

“ Thank you so much ! I never could have made that trip alone.”

“ It would have been unwise to attempt it,” he replied, seating himself beside her ; “ the train is running at terrific speed and rounding these curves without any regard to signals.”

“ Why, they surely would not do that ! ”

“ It is what they are doing. We flashed past a signal to slow down back there without slackening a particle. That was why I insisted on returning to this car. If anything were to happen, the rear cars would suffer most.”

“ Do you think there is any real danger ? ” she asked, her face paling slightly.

“ There is always danger where people take such risks ; but ” —he smiled into the anxious eyes— “ we pass through a great many dangers that we are unconscious of, unharmed, and a consciousness of danger doesn’t increase it, but only prepares us the better to meet it.”

“ At any rate,” she exclaimed impulsively, “ I’m glad I’m not alone. I feel much safer with you. I’ve

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regarded you as a sort of knight errant ever since I met you on the 'Limited,' " she added, smiling.

"Thank you ; should the need for one arise, I hope I may prove myself worthy to be so regarded by you."

The words in themselves were not particularly significant, but the way in which he said them caused her pulses to quicken unaccountably and sent the blood rioting through her veins. She wondered at herself, at him ; how could this stranger by his looks, his tones, move her as no one yet—not even the foster father whom she loved so deeply—had ever moved her ?

When the waiter announced dinner, Helen looked up in astonishment.

"Dinner ! It isn't possible ! Where has the morning gone ? Father Time must be racing against himself to-day," she exclaimed.

"The morning has passed swiftly, hasn't it ?" he replied, taking out his watch, as their eyes met in a smile of mutual surprise. He was leaning slightly toward her and as he opened the watch—which she had already noted as being of peculiar form and design—she saw the interior of the case for the first time. She had observed that it was of unusual thickness ; now she saw the cause. Opposite the dial was a small, but beautifully painted, portrait of a woman's face. So much she saw, no more ; he closed the watch and turned to speak to her, but paused, checked by what he saw in her face, though she was not looking at him. For an instant, Helen experienced the sensation of one who has received an unexpected blow, and though she set herself to reason against it, the effect remained. In vain she reflected that this stranger, so many years

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her senior, was in all probability a married man, for as she did so, she recalled glances and tones that refuted the supposition—unless he were dishonorable, and this she could not bring herself to believe.

Meanwhile her companion, quick to note the subtle change in her manner and equally quick to discern its cause, was undergoing a sharp mental struggle. There were reasons for his reserve concerning himself; for another's sake, he was guarding his own identity, but this beautiful girl who trusted him had appealed to him as no one had ever done, and he had tried, delicately and unobtrusively, to make her aware of his interest in her; how would she regard him now? In a moment his decision was taken; he would risk anything rather than forfeit her respect.

Helen, with face slightly averted, heard the click of the watch-case, as he again opened it; then she heard his voice close to her ear:

“May I show you my mother's portrait?”

She did not start, but turned her head slowly, her eyes meeting his searchingly for an instant.

“Your mother's? I should like to see it,” she answered with perfect composure; but as her eyes fell on the portrait her little air of indifference vanished and she exclaimed:

“Oh, how sweet! Isn't she dear!”

It was that of a woman in early middle age, but with the rounded contour, the upward curving mouth and something of the unsullied sweetness and innocence of a child's face. The eyes were especially beautiful; large brown eyes, with a look of wistful tenderness in their depths.

She looked from the portrait to his face: “And you

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are not like her at all ; unless," she hesitated, suddenly conscious of the tender appeal in the dark eyes fixed on her face, "yes, your expression at times is like hers. Your face changes wonderfully when you smile ; at other times you seem to remind me of some one. But her face is beautiful ; she must be a lovely woman."

He looked at the portrait a moment before replying reverently : "She was one of the best women that ever lived."

" 'Was' ?" Helen repeated gently with upward inflection.

He bowed silently, then added, "I lost her less than six weeks ago."

Helen's quick sympathy was aroused but she was at loss how to express it. Sorrow was an experience unknown in her life and she knew not what to say. Moved by a sudden impulse, she laid her hand lightly on his arm, scarcely knowing what she did till his hand closed over hers, holding it in a firm clasp. Mentally she was contrasting his situation with her own.

"And your father," she asked, half timidly, "is he living ?"

A change came over his face ; the tenderness vanished, leaving it set and stern, and again she saw the puzzling, elusive likeness.

"Yes," he replied slowly, "he is living, but—I have never seen him."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said quickly ; "I should not have asked only that your devotion to your mother struck me the more forcibly because, in my own case, it is so different ;" she hesitated, while he

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regarded her inquiringly. "My father," she continued, "is so much nearer and dearer to me than my mother."

"That, to me, seems incredible," he exclaimed.

"It is true, however, and what makes it the more strange——"

There was a sudden wrench backward that threw them from their seats ; the car trembled and shook as though it were a toy in some giant hand, rocked and reeled sidewise, then, fore-end uppermost, plunged backward and downward, accompanied by the shattering of glass, the groaning and crashing of woodwork and the shrieks of passengers.

At the first shock, the young man had clasped Helen in his arms and holding her beneath him, interposed his body as a shield between her and the objects crashing about them, bracing himself and gripping the woodwork to keep from being thrown to the rear and downward end of the car.

When at last, after several terrible rebounds, the car became stationary, Helen and her companion found themselves firmly wedged between the seats. She was practically unhurt, having suffered only from the wrench and strain. He was bruised and bleeding, but reported no bones broken.

"Slightly disfigured, but as good as ever," he told her laughingly, when he had succeeded in extricating himself. His next effort was to free her, which he accomplished in a few moments.

Fortunately, they were near the forward end of the car, where they had little difficulty in crawling out upon the embankment against which it rested. There a fearful sight confronted them. In rounding a sharp

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curve at high speed, the rear car had jumped the track and rolled to the bottom of the embankment, some eighty feet below, where it lay completely overturned.

The intervening cars between that and their own were piled in confusion one on top of another, and on this pile the rear end of their car rested, canted slightly to one side.

From the upper cars, people were crawling, with or without assistance, to the embankment, as they had done ; but around the overturned car, a crew of men were already at work with axes, saws and crow-bars, taking out the crushed, mangled forms, many of them lifeless ; while down the road, in the distance, men were hurrying with teams and hastily improvised stretchers.

Helen turned to her companion, her brown eyes wide with horror.

“Oh, see what you have saved me from !” she exclaimed, “If you had not insisted on my leaving that car——” she broke down, overcome by the shock and excitement. He saw that she was trembling, and drawing her to him, soothed her as though she had been a child.

She quickly recovered herself and looked up, smiling through her tears. “Didn’t I say a while ago you were my knight errant ? Now you have proved it. Oh, how can I ever repay you !”

“I want no pay or reward,” he said gravely.

“No, I didn’t mean that,” she replied quickly, “but how can I ever express my gratitude, or——” she hesitated, her color deepening under his gaze.

“Some time I will tell you,” he said, with one of

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his grave, tender smiles, "if you think you would care to hear. Do you?"

Her eyes answered, rather than her lips, but he seemed well content. A moment later, he said:

"If I am a true knight errant I must help to save life down below. Do you mind if I leave you for a while? I will come back."

"No, go by all means; I wouldn't keep you."

She watched him running and sliding down the embankment until he joined the crew of workers below; then, with sudden resolution, she made her way down the steep descent to a group of women near the wreck who were tearing bandages and helping to care for the rescued ones. All about her were gruesome and sickening sights, but she nerved herself for the occasion and soon forgot her surroundings in her work. From time to time, she saw her late companion, and once, as he passed, he saw her and his look of surprised pleasure and approval brought a glow to her heart and a corresponding light to her eyes.

A few moments later, there was a shout of warning, followed by a crash. In chopping away portions of the overturned car, the part upon which the next car was resting suddenly gave way, and the car toppled and slid downward, carrying beneath it some of the rescuers. Helen sprang forward with a cry, for it had fallen where her friend had been standing a moment before. It was quickly pried up and he, among others, was drawn out from under it, unconscious and with a broken arm.

"To the hospital," was the surgeon's command after a brief examination. There was no time to stop for identification, that would be attended to at the

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hospital. The surgeon assured Helen his injuries were not serious ; he was merely stunned. With a heavy heart, she returned to her work after seeing him, with a number of others, borne away in the direction of the nearest town.

That afternoon Helen was compelled to continue her journey with no further news of her friend, not knowing even the name of the hospital to which he had been taken.

The following morning, while reading in the morning paper an account of the preceding day's disaster, she found toward the close, the following paragraph :

The young man who was caught beneath the falling car while assisting in the work of rescuing passengers, recovered consciousness soon after reaching the hospital, but refused to give his name ; and after the fracture of his arm had been reduced, left, without disclosing his identity, and no one seems to know what has become of him.

But the young stranger with his arm in a sling, confined by a low fever to his room in a hotel in a neighboring town, did not read in a coast paper, a few days later, of the narrow escape from death by railway accident of the only daughter of the Hon. Thomas Macavoy Denning.

XVIII

THE "KINDNESS" OF FATE

"I WOULD like to meet this young hero of yours. He should have whatever he wanted, 'even to the half of my kingdom.'"

"That is rather a rash pledge, pater; you know that one who once made it had cause to regret it afterwards."

"Eh! Is that so? Well, I'll take the risk anyway. If he ever shows up, I'll set him up in business or start him in politics, whichever he likes."

"I don't think, daddy dear, he would care for those things. I mean—well, he didn't look to be the sort of man you could offer to do things for, you know."

"I'll leave it to him then. He couldn't ask for anything I wouldn't give, after his having saved my little girl for me. Gad! Helen, I couldn't lose you out of my life."

Helen Denning felt her cheeks suddenly flame at the thought of what this individual under consideration might ask, but her only reply was to wind her arm closer about her father's neck and lay her flushing cheek against his head.

In many respects Denning had greatly changed since the day when Richards called to pay his respects to the mayor of Rockland. In the decision formed at

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that turning-point in his life he had taken a step backward, and in certain directions had been retrograding every since. Knowing the fearful, secret odds against him, he had, in his desperate haste to reach the goal, thrown conservatism to the winds and sought political preferment by any and every means, crushing whoever or whatever came in his way as relentlessly and remorselessly as the avalanche grinds the rocks in its path. To a certain extent the effect was visible in his face and general appearance. He had aged beyond his years ; the black hair had become iron-gray ; the hard lines about his mouth had deepened and intensified ; the keen, penetrating eyes had acquired a wary, crafty expression, as though on the lookout for hidden foes. Moreover, his high living had given him a tendency towards corpulence ; his pale face became florid under excitement, and he seemed to have coarsened in thought and speech.

But in his affection for his foster child he remained unchanged. He exulted in her beauty ; he confided to her his hopes and plans ; he idolized her. But even his love for her was, like his every other emotion, of the very essence of selfishness. He loved her because she ministered to his happiness. In her, and her alone, his expectations were fulfilled. Even his successes, his political triumphs, were beginning to pall. They were attained at such tremendous cost, and when he grasped them, they were so empty and unsatisfying, after all.

His home life, too, was disappointing. He and his wife had drifted so widely apart that their nominal relationship served only to keep up appearances before

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the world, and to hoodwink that easily blinded goddess, Society. His son, nearly entering his fifteenth year, was the bitterest disappointment of all. He bore not the slightest resemblance to his father except in the intense selfishness of his nature. Handsome, cold, utterly averse to anything like a business life and wholly dominated by his mother, his father saw his hopes of a son to take his place and perpetuate his name among the kings of finance frustrated.

At this period of his life, as never before, Denning felt the need of some one with a thorough knowledge of financial matters, whom he could at the same time trust implicitly, to take, in a measure, his place and to look after certain interests in connection with the bank with which he had been so long associated. He had received the nomination for governor and a hard campaign lay before him—for by this time he had strong political foes—necessitating frequent and prolonged absences from the city. A large amount of funds would be needed for “campaign purposes.” These funds would have to be discreetly handled by the North Western, and the cashier was not a man to whom these matters could be safely intrusted ; he was of the opposite party.

Several weeks had passed since Helen’s return. In all the time there had been neither word nor sign from her “knight errant.” How could there be—she reflected—when neither knew the other’s name or destination? It seemed strange to her now, as she recalled the friendly intimacy of those last two days, that they had not learned these simple facts regarding each other ; but through all their friendliness, there had been a certain reserve on his part, which had

THE "KINDNESS" OF FATE

naturally bred something of a like reserve on her own. Afterward, when the shock and danger had brought to them a new knowledge of themselves and of each other, all else was for the time forgotten, and later, there had been no opportunity for speech.

Yet, notwithstanding this obvious difficulty in the way of their meeting again, Helen had no doubt but that they would find one another. Whether she trusted to the Fate which had brought them together, to reunite them, or to telepathic vibrations to draw them each to each, she could not have told, but she went her way untroubled by doubt or regret and untinctured by morbid imaginations ; entering, meanwhile, into her father's plans with youthful, healthful enthusiasm and accompanying him on many of his tours over the State, in the interests of the coming campaign.

To the young man himself, the case seemed far less hopeful. To him, the chances of their meeting seemed infinitely small. Though impatient to push on to his original destination, he waited till a sling for his arm was no longer necessary, and while waiting, revolved all manner of plans for ascertaining the identity and whereabouts of his recent companion ; resolving, in his more desperate moments, to advertise if all other means failed.

Time dragged heavily for him, but the day came when he could resume his journey, and the following morning found him within the borders of the State in which it was to end. As he neared his destination and recalled the business which had brought him west, other and less pleasant thoughts than those of Helen began to crowd upon his mind.

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Seated apart from his fellow travellers, with cap pulled over his eyes, his white face set and stern, he mentally rehearsed his part in the dreaded but inevitable interview which each hour was bringing nearer ; the execution of the commission for which he had given his word as a sacred pledge. The train stopped, but he paid little heed, so absorbed was he in his own thoughts, till roused from his reverie by an unusual commotion about him and the repetition of a name that arrested his attention.

"What are we waiting here for?" some one inquired.

"For Mac Denning's private car to be coupled on to our train," was the reply from a man who had been out to investigate.

"Mac Denning," repeated another, "is that the Denning that's running for governor out here?"

"That's what, and you bet he'll get there, too!" a fourth answered enthusiastically.

"If he does," rejoined the second speaker, "he'll know he's been in a fight, all right. He isn't going to have any walk-away *this* time. Folks are getting on to his curves."

"Oh, yes; talk's cheap, Martin, but your party can't put up a man that can beat him."

"I say, let's go out and take a look at him," chimed in one who had not spoken; "Come on, Ed,"—nudging a drowsy fellow traveller in the ribs—"come on and have a look at our next governor."

There was a general exodus from the car. The young man who had been a silent listener, followed the crowd, his pulses throbbing with excitement, yet feeling the peculiar sensation of one moving in a

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dream. As he stepped from the train, he saw, standing on a side-track at the rear, a handsome private car, and near it a group of men about whom a small, but constantly increasing, crowd was gathering. A glance revealed to him which of the group was the candidate for gubernatorial honors.

He saw a tall, broad shouldered man, of imposing appearance ; a man evidently accustomed to command, who looked as though he knew no such word as "fail" ; his face, with its clear-cut features and well defined lines, was confident, aggressive, dominant.

The crowd called for a speech and Denning responded with that air of suave affability and easy assurance that made him popular with crowds. But behind the smile, the keen young eyes watching him saw the politician ; wary, crafty, astute.

Standing a little apart from the crowd, he studied the speaker with strangely commingled emotions. This, then, was the man who had scorned and deserted the woman whom he loved and honored as his mother ; who, ignorant of, or ignoring, his existence, had left him fatherless for thirty years ! This was the father whom he had never seen or known ; who had been to him only a name ! He felt the old bitter resentment of his boyhood and youth toward this man swelling anew within his bosom ; but pitted over against it was another emotion, strange, unfamiliar, for which he was totally unprepared ; the subtle, mysterious, force that unites, by an indissoluble bond, those of the same blood. It appealed to him—without kith or kin—with irresistible power, causing his heart to quicken its beating and even his eyes to fill with unwelcome tears.

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With eyes fastened on the speaker's face, his own face rigid with the effort to repress his feeling, he stood, immovable, utterly oblivious to passers by, till the close of the brief address ; then turned—to confront Helen Denning, standing at a little distance and regarding him with wondering eyes.

The swift transformation in his face, at sight of her, seemed to have a slightly disconcerting effect upon Helen ; she colored, though her eyes reflected something of the light in his own.

“You must be intensely interested in politics,” she said, after an exchange of rather incoherent greetings ; “I passed you a moment ago and you never saw me.”

“I think it must have been the speaker, rather than the speech, that interested me,” he replied, with a peculiar smile, “for I cannot recall a word he said.”

“What a unique compliment to the speaker ! I am sure it would please him immensely. But where have you been since the ‘smash-up’ ? And were you seriously injured ?”

“Nothing but a broken arm. I have been waiting for it to mend thoroughly before continuing my journey, which I resumed only yesterday. Meanwhile I have been racking my brains trying to solve the problem how I was to find you.”

“And have had your labor for your pains, since the problem has solved itself,” she replied merrily, “Fate seems to have taken the matter out of your hands.”

“Fate has been very kind to me,” he answered with emphasis and a look that made Helen hasten to say :

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"That is no excuse for tempting her in such a reckless fashion. Think of the absurdity of our learning absolutely nothing of each other in all that time, not even one another's names!"

"They did not seem particularly essential then, nor do they just at present," he remarked, smiling.

"Oh, but they are, you know," she insisted, "therefore I will introduce myself at once. My name is Helen Denning, and if you will give me your name I will present you to my father, along with your recent compliment, which he will appreciate, and we will be delighted to have you join us in our car."

While speaking, she had watched him mischievously, anticipating some slight sign of surprise on his part, but totally unprepared for the effect produced by her words.

With the mention of her name, the light in his eyes suddenly faded, and in its place a dim, fearful apprehension dawned, deepening as she proceeded, while an unnatural pallor overspread his face.

"Pardon me," he said, in a low, constrained voice when she stopped: "Did I understand aright? Are you a daughter of the Mr. Denning who has just spoken?"

"I am," she replied wonderingly, unable in her surprise to more than answer in the affirmative. But at sight of the gloom and misery which settled upon his face at her admission, she could not remain silent.

"Oh, tell me, what have I said to distress you so? I cannot imagine, cannot understand."

"And I fear I cannot explain," he answered slowly, as though trying to collect his thoughts.

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She regarded him silently, while various surmises flashed across her mind. He was not the sort to be intimidated by her position or wealth, she was sure of that; she was equally sure that he was honorable. Suddenly she recalled the strange expression with which he had watched her father while listening to his address.

"Do you know my father?" she asked eagerly.

"Only by reputation," he replied with a certain deliberation, having made up his mind how far he could explain the situation; "I have never met Mr. Denning, but I have come west for that express purpose."

"To meet my father! How strange!" she exclaimed, adding. "And he has so many times expressed a wish to meet you, knowing, as he does, your kindness to me."

Her words helped him; he seized the excuse they offered.

"For that very reason, Miss Denning,"—he seemed to speak the name with an effort—"as well as for others which I am not at liberty to state, I cannot—much as I would like to accede to your wishes—accept your offer to present me to your father. I have a letter to Mr. Denning, and that and my card must be my only introduction. It is best that he should meet me as an entire stranger, unprejudiced for or against me."

He spoke with more ease, but his face, even to his lips, was ashen.

"You, of course, know best," Helen replied, wondering at his agitation.

"My business with Mr. Denning is not for myself,"

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he continued, thinking she might perhaps regard him as an applicant for some favor, political or otherwise ; "I am here simply to execute a commission for a third party. When that is ended——" he hesitated, uncertain how to complete the sentence.

"When that is ended, I hope I may present my 'knight errant,' " she said, with forced cheerfulness.

"Possibly," he said with a faint smile, but the shadow on his face deepened.

"At least, may I not know your name?"

His eyes met hers appealingly : "May I hope for pardon if I withhold it until after my interview with Mr. Denning?"

If she felt any annoyance, the unmistakable signs of suffering in the face before her restrained her from showing it.

"There seems to be some mystery back of all this," she said, "and I don't like mysteries."

"Nor do I," he replied gravely ; "but I have no choice in the matter. It is another's secret I am guarding, not my own."

"Tell me one thing," she pleaded, woman-like ; "I feel certain your errand is an unpleasant one, but is it friendly to my father, or the reverse?"

His reply reassured her : "Friendly, entirely so ; but, as you surmise, unpleasant, for him and for me."

After a moment's silence, she said, "I see people are returning to the train, so I must leave you. I suppose there is no use in asking you to visit our car?"

"I may visit Mr. Denning, if you think I would find him unengaged."

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“I think you might. I believe,” she added, smiling “he has no more speeches en route.”

“I probably will call upon him then.”

“And afterward?” she asked, extending her hand, “I will see you again, will I not?”

“Afterward?” he repeated, as his hand closed over hers : “Yes, we will meet ; and I hope you will then think as kindly of the past as I shall.”

XIX

FACE TO FACE

HELEN was unable to banish those last words from her thoughts. They rang in her ears, as, seated in the luxurious drawing room of her father's car, she gazed through the window with unseeing eyes upon the panorama speeding past.

They seemed to imply that even though they should meet again, it would be upon a different footing, in a changed relationship, in which the past would henceforth be only a memory. More than that, as she recalled their brief interview, she realized that he *had* changed from the moment he had learned who she was ; he had not been the same afterward.

Helen was gifted with clear perceptions. Her love for her father did not blind her to his faults. She, better than any one else, knew his inordinate selfishness. She was painfully cognizant of the slow deterioration in his manners and morals during these later years. Moreover, she was familiar with the charges from time to time brought against him by the press ; charges of corruption and bribery, which though they remained unproven, remained also unfuted. And perhaps, because of this knowledge, her love for him—partaking more of the maternal than the filial instinct—was the more tender.

It was not unnatural, therefore, that she should now connect the visit of this stranger with the political

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situation. He had been careful to entirely dissociate himself from his business with her father. Perhaps his commission had to do with some forthcoming "disclosure," imminent, fatal, which a reasonable consideration might suppress; and he disdained further friendship with the daughter of a corruptionist.

She was unable to rid herself of a sense of impending evil as, oppressed and saddened, she awaited the result of this strange interview.

Meanwhile, the subject of her thoughts was bracing himself for the ordeal before him. Under the powerful emotions awakened by the sight of his father, the sound of his voice, the thrilling consciousness that here was his own flesh and blood, the life from which his life had sprung, he had felt an eagerness for the coming interview. At once attracted and repelled by the strong personality which he recognized as akin to his own, he felt a swift longing to pit himself against it and measure his own strength by the result.

But the meeting with Helen had, to a degree, unnerved him. In the first flush of joy an entirely different set of emotions had been aroused; and in the shock which followed—the transition from the seeming fulfilment of hope to the loss of hope—he had been so dazed, stunned, that all emotions were for the time dulled, blunted. As he recalled the scene, the irony of the situation forced itself upon him; he had said to her that Fate had been kind to him! He smiled bitterly at the recollection of the words.

Denning, seated at his desk, in his private compartment, glanced frowningly at a telegram just handed him. Affairs at the North Western were not being handled aright. That he was needed there was only

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too evident. But his presence "in the field" was even more imperative. Some one must represent him in the bank, but who? It must be a man familiar with banking; entirely dissociated from politics, with no interest in, or knowledge of, the intricacies of the political situation; some one whom he could trust to follow his commands implicitly. But where was such a man to be found?

He was still frowning when his secretary announced that a gentleman was waiting to see him.

"On what business?"

"Private business, he says. He declined to give his name."

"Show him in," Denning ordered briefly, anticipating a message from some one of his lieutenants.

He glanced keenly, but casually, at the stranger as he entered, but the glance was prolonged into a steady gaze as he rose to meet him. He was not the sort of man he had expected to see. Plainly, this man was no political messenger, but that he had come on important business was equally evident.

"Mr. Denning, I believe?"

Denning bowed slightly, without at once speaking or looking at the card which he had taken mechanically and was now holding. A pair of eyes, the counterpart of his own, met and held his gaze. He recalled himself and glanced at the name on the bit of pasteboard in his hand—Thomas Macavoy Denning!

For an instant Denning wondered if the hour of his doom had come; he grew a shade paler and the hand holding the card trembled slightly. In the next breath, his indomitable will rose to the occasion; he would hold his fate in his own hands yet!

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For a moment, the two men regarded each other silently, sternly ; each at the same time attracted and repelled by the other ; attracted by the mysterious but irresistible tie of consanguinity, repelled by their utter unlikeness and lack of affinity from a psychical standpoint. In the younger man, of finer sensibility, the consciousness of aversion gradually gained ascendancy ; in the elder, coarser, more sensual, the tie of flesh and blood prevailed.

“ You are a Denning ; that is evident,” he said, an unconscious note of pride vibrating in his voice, his stern face relaxing into a smile as he extended his hand.

The other’s first impulse was to ignore the outstretched hand, but he thought better of it. As their hands clasped, however, a magnetic thrill from the ever dominating personality of the elder man vibrated through the keenly sensitive organism of the younger so that their eyes met in a more friendly glance, though each remained non-committal, awaiting further developments.

“ As you bear my name, you are doubtless my son,” Denning continued slowly ; “ your mother was ——” he paused.

“ Millicent Heldt, before her marriage with you,” the other supplemented unhesitatingly.

Denning bowed : “ You are then my elder son. Be seated ;” indicating a chair near his desk and seating himself : “ What can I do for you ?”

“ I have not come here on my own behalf,” said the younger man slowly, drawing from his pocket a memorandum book from which he proceeded to extract a letter : “ I have come in the execution of a

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commission which I promised to perform. I have here a letter for you, a letter from my mother."

"From your mother?" Denning repeated. "Why does your mother seek to open up any communication with me now after all these years? What does she wish of me?"

"My mother had no intention of opening communication with you, as you will see if you read this," the other answered coldly; "she had no favor to ask of you—nor have I. This is her dying message to you and as such, I hardly think you will refuse to read it."

"Dying, did you say?" Denning exclaimed in an altered tone, "Your mother is dying?"

"She is dead." Then, after a slight pause: "You will read this?"

"Most assuredly; I had no intention of refusing to do so."

Taking the letter from his son, he proceeded to open and read it. The writing was evidently the work of a person unaccustomed to the task; cramped and labored, but executed with great pains and perfectly legible. The letter began simply and without preamble:

DEAR TOM:—

When you went away that night, over thirty years ago, there was something I wanted to tell you, but I didn't know just how and I was afraid you might be angry. But maybe you will remember that you said you were going to try to forget me and that you didn't want anything that would remind you of me. In one way, that made me very glad, for I thought then there was no need for you to know what I was trying to bring myself to tell you. Early the next summer my baby came, and thinking you would not care for him, I

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felt that he was mine to keep. I named him for you, though, and determined to bring him up to be as much like you as possible. To do this, I left home and started a little store which soon supported us, for I wanted to save the money you left me for my boy, to give him an education and a good start in life. For my boy's sake I worked and saved ; for his sake I tried to improve myself, so that as he grew older he needn't be ashamed of his mother. My store grew into a news-stand and bookstore and every leisure minute I spent in reading and study. I was so proud as I saw him growing more and more like you and I taught him to respect and honor the father who, I told him, had gone away for a good reason that I would explain to him when he was old enough to understand.

And right here, I want to say, Tom, that I have never had an unkind thought toward you. As I read more and understood things better, I began to understand why you never could have been happy with me. We ought never to have married, except for our boy's sake. And this brings me to something I want to explain—why I never got a divorce. Tom, I never had a father. The folks didn't tell you, nor would they let me, but Heldt was not my father ; and remembering the taunts and jeers I had to bear when a child, I determined my boy should never have to suffer that way. And I was afraid if I got a divorce that my boy would have no father and I determined there should be no blot on his life. Afterward, when I had learned more about such things, I had heard nothing of you for so long I thought you were dead, until, a few weeks ago, I saw your name in a paper. The paper spoke of you as a great man and very wealthy and mentioned your family. Then I felt worried for fear I had not done right in not getting a divorce. But you will be free when you get this, for I am dying. And I have made my son promise to go to you with this message as soon as I am gone, so as to try to right the wrong, if there has been any done.

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There is one thing more. As my son has grown to manhood he has been such a joy and comfort to me that I have felt conscience smitten in withholding him from you. Yet I felt as though you had so much, while he was my *all*. But when one comes to the end of life things look different. I feel that I have done wrong in defrauding you all these years of a son of whom you have every reason to be proud. I have, as I said, taught him to respect and honor you ; had he known you personally I am sure he would have learned to love you—and perhaps you need him, who knows? Wealth cannot always buy what we need most.

So now, dear Tom, I assure you of my joy in your good fortune, of my entire forgiveness for whatever may have hurt in the past before I came to understand, and I hope that you will as freely forgive me if in any way I have wronged you, knowing that I did it unwittingly.

My last words to you were a promise that I would never do anything you would need be ashamed of. I have not only fulfilled that promise, but I give and bequeath to you a son of whom you need never be ashamed.

Faithfully,

MILLY.

To Denning's credit be it said, that time-hardened and blunted as were his sensibilities, he was touched by the spirit which had prompted this letter. He looked from the pages, still open in his hand, to the young man before him, stamped, by the faithful love of this woman, with his own personality. He recognized his own individuality and felt instinctively that here was the son he had hoped for, the son to perpetuate not only his name, but *himself*.

Denning's mind worked swiftly. Here was a man who was bound to rise, to make a name in the world. Associated with himself, he would be invaluable ; dissociated, he would be a constant menace. He felt

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the antagonism lurking in the calm, stern face, and that he must overcome it, must win him at all hazards.

He folded the letter almost reverently and returned it, saying in a low voice :

“Take it, my son ; it had better be in your possession than in mine ;” adding, “you are, I presume, familiar with its contents ?”

“I am. I read it at my mother’s request.”

“I think I understand and appreciate the motive which prompted it,” Denning continued slowly, choosing his words with care, “and if it results, as I hope it may, in a perfect understanding between us, as between father and son, I think the letter will have accomplished its mission.”

“That was not its prime object, however,” the other replied quickly. “From the time my mother learned you were living and had remarried, she was harassed by an impression that you had, under a misapprehension, unknowingly, made a false move as it were, and it was to rectify any such possible mistake that the letter was written. The part relating to myself was an afterthought, and was written but a few days before her death.”

“Then we may safely assume that that was of the greatest interest to her and it is that which more particularly concerns ourselves, so let us come to a mutual understanding. Tell me of yourself and what I can do for you.”

“I have already told you that I have no favors to ask,” was the cold reply.

“But I,” said Denning, smiling, “was not thinking of favors, but of what is your due as my son.”

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His son smiled faintly : "Pardon me, but it seems rather late in the day for thinking of that. I am established in business with a good future before me. If there is anything my due, I have done very well without it so far and certainly do not need it now."

"What line of business are you in?" Denning inquired, ignoring, for the time, the thrust.

"Banking."

"What?" he ejaculated, unable to restrain his surprise.

"Yes, I've always had a natural inclination toward it, I don't know why. I was a bank messenger before I entered college ; I worked in the same bank as clerk and bookkeeper during my vacations, and when I graduated they made me teller ; and I've been climbing ever since."

"What position do you hold now?"

"I am cashier." Then, noting a peculiar look in his father's face, he added : "I was made assistant cashier five years ago, and when the head cashier died eighteen months since, I was given his place."

Denning could scarcely credit what he heard, or control his pride and delight. Here was a son after his own heart ! Here, too, was the very man for the North Western !

After a few general inquiries, he asked : "What salary are you getting?"

The young man named a fair salary.

Denning swung himself around, directly facing his son and laid a hand on his knee.

"My son," he said, speaking with great deliberation, "I will double your present salary if you will accept the position of cashier in my bank at Rockland."

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If he expected any sign of surprise, he was disappointed. The other smiled coolly, almost quizzically.

"Do you hire cashiers, like office boys, in your bank ; or are they elected ?" he queried.

"They are elected, but I come pretty near controlling the elections in that institution," the elder man retorted with considerable warmth.

"I see !"

A brief silence followed, during which each man was mentally taking the measure of the other.

"You either need my services as cashier very badly," said the younger man significantly, his keen eyes challenging the other as he spoke, "or else you have reasons for putting me under a heavy obligation to you."

Denning took the challenge : "I do need you. Your mother was right when she said I needed you. I need a *son*."

"Have you no other son ?" interposed the other in surprise.

"Yes, I have, though no one would think him a son of mine. He is but a boy and he will never take my place in the world ; his mother has other plans for him."

The young man noted the bitterness with which he spoke.

"I want a son to perpetuate not only my name, but myself ; who will take my place and represent me when I am ready to retire. And I need you in my bank—as you say—very badly. I'll explain why. I have been president of that bank from the first day it opened its doors ; I've made it what it is—one of the soundest and most reliable institutions in the West.

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Naturally, I'm interested in it; my personal name and honor are closely affiliated with it. Now, I've received the nomination for governor. There's a hard fight ahead and I've got to be in the field. If I'm elected—and I will be—my time will be spent in the capital city and in State affairs. You see I've got to have some one in that bank in direct touch with myself, who will guard my interests, work under my directions; in a word, represent me there, and you are the only one who can do it."

Denning saw his words had made an impression and he paused to let them take effect.

The younger man was thinking deeply. Enough of the Denning blood flowed in his veins to make his father's offer appeal to him with tremendous force. Not in years—perhaps not in a lifetime—would he have another such an opportunity. He understood, too, the prestige to be gained by association with his father, and to one who had hitherto made his own way, unaided, the prospect was particularly alluring. At the same time, his self-reliance rebelled against a position which would involve obligation to his father; he felt doubtful as to what that obligation itself might involve later; while back of all, was the thought of Helen, of the frequent association with her; loving her as he did, could he do it, under the circumstances? Should he attempt it? Should he not rather refuse, not for his own sake alone, but perhaps for hers, also?

Denning, watching closely, saw the struggle, the hesitation. Drawing his chair closer, he laid a firm, compelling hand upon his son's shoulder.

"Don't decide this matter hastily," he said; "take time to think it over. Go home with me. Look the

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situation over carefully ; you don't know yet all that it means to you. My son, it won't be very long before I'll be in the United States senate, and if you come up to my expectations, as I believe you will, you can be president of the North Western before you are ten years older. I need you and I'll do the right thing by you as your father. You said a while ago it was late in the day to think of these things. That may be—I can make it up, however—but to show that you misjudged me, until within a few years since—long since you attained your majority—I didn't even know of your existence."

The reply was not what he expected.

"That is scarcely to be wondered at."

"Why so?"

The young man looked surprised at the question.

"Ignoring, as you did, my mother's existence, how could you be otherwise than ignorant of mine?"

There was no trace of bitterness in his tones ; he asked the question as calmly as though he had been submitting a mathematical problem, but the look that accompanied the words stung.

Smarting under its sting, Denning forgot the caution which had restrained him in the earlier part of their interview. Half rising from his chair, he exclaimed :

"Don't go too far, young man ! Those years in which you say I ignored your mother, I believed her dead ; I had been so informed, on what I considered good authority. Does that satisfy you ? Does that explain the sins of omission you have laid to my account ?"

"Of omission, and perhaps of commission, also,"

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his son replied gravely. "Did you remarry on the strength of that information and belief?"

The question came like a blow to Denning; for an instant it staggered him.

"It is to be hoped you did," the younger man continued, "for without that excuse, your act would have been nothing less than criminal."

It was suddenly borne in upon Denning's mind that his son had forced him into a position where he had no alternative except to admit the truth. Denial or evasion would only make the matter worse. With the realization, rage and fear seized him; but fear predominated. In his eyes was the look of an animal cornered, ready to spring, yet held back by terror. He tried to speak, but only a clicking sound came from his parched throat, while his face grew livid.

"Father!"—the word came unconsciously to the lips of the younger man as he sprang forward—"Calm yourself. I did not come here to alarm or intimidate you. I simply wanted to get at the truth which you have evaded from the beginning of this interview."

At a sign from his father, he resumed his seat, remaining silent while Denning, leaning forward upon his desk, buried his face in his hands. When at length he lifted his head, his face was gray and, but for the eyes, looked as though cut out of stone, so hard, so devoid of expression had it grown.

"Well, you have got at the truth," he said, "What do you propose to do about it?"

"Nothing whatever. I have nothing to do in the case," the other replied, with slight emphasis on the pronoun.

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Then, as his father remained silent, he continued :
“I have learned nothing new. There were only two hypotheses possible under the circumstances ; my mother inclined to the more charitable one, I to the other. I wished to ascertain which of us was correct, but you evaded the issue till I forced you to it. As I said, I am glad to find that what I believed a crime, was but a mistake ; the results might be the same, but your conscience was clear so long as you were ignorant of any error.”

“Yes, it was a mistake,” Denning responded gloomily.

“When did you discover it?”

“About six years ago.”

“What ! And you have made no attempt in all this time to rectify it?”

Denning faced his son with the look of a desperate man : “It was useless to attempt it then, and it is equally useless to attempt it now. The wrong is done and it can’t be undone.”

His words and the look accompanying them led his son to believe that his mind was becoming affected by the strain—that he was to a certain extent insane.

“Will you tell me,” he asked, with forced calmness, “why it cannot be undone?”

“Because I would be a ruined man within a week.”

“Why, surely now that you are absolutely free, this could be adjusted between yourself and your wife and your marriage legalized without injuring your interests or your reputation.”

“Do you think,” said Denning, regaining his composure in a measure, “that this could be done, even along the lines you suggest, without some inkling of

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the facts leaking out, to be seized upon, magnified, distorted and used by calumniators in the coming campaign? No. Well, then; supposing there could be no adjustment between myself and my wife, and that she, merciless, implacable, bruited the affair far and wide, sent it broadcast to the four winds, what would it mean to me?"

"But she must consent to a legal marriage with you for the sake of the children——"

"To the mere ceremony to legitimize them? Yes; but to no marriage as such. She would brand me, stigmatize me, ruin me socially and politically, every way."

"But surely you would not sacrifice your children's rights—their very name, even—to your social and political ambitions!" The thought of Helen occurred to him in this connection and he forgot for the moment that she was his sister and that he was addressing his father as well as hers: "Good heavens, man!" he exclaimed, rising in his agitation, "think of your daughter. Would you sacrifice that beautiful girl—brand her as illegitimate—for any political honors?"

"My daughter!" Denning ejaculated, "what do you know of my daughter?"

"I know her love for you; she has told me that much herself."

"Helen has told you? Good God! does *she* know?"

"My errand here? No, nor the relationship between herself and myself; nor did I until to-day."

"But how—when did you meet?"

"On a west-bound train recently. We were fellow-passengers for a number of days. I was on my way

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to Rockland at the time, but was delayed by an accident."

Denning's face underwent a swift transformation ; it was lighted with pleasure as he sprang to his feet, seizing his son's hand in both his own.

"It was you, then, my boy, who saved her life in that wreck ! I know the whole story," he continued, without allowing him to speak ; "but for your forethought, she would have been among the victims in the overturned car. It is I who am indebted to you, a debt I can never repay ! You don't know what she is to me ! You can have anything—everything—you want."

"I want nothing—for myself. But if your daughter is so much to you, have you no thought or care for her in this matter of which we were speaking?"

"I think I can convince you that I have her best interests at heart. Let us sit down."

As they seated themselves, Denning resumed : "You are looking at this from a hypothetical and theoretical standpoint ; I, from a practical. You are speculating on what would result if these facts were brought to light. So long as they are unknown, there is no reason why matters shouldn't run as smoothly for ten years to come as for ten years past. By that time I'll be in a position to defy my enemies. A bit of scandal doesn't hurt a United States senator nowadays, if he has plenty of money. But to go back ; who, besides you and I, knows the facts in this case?"

"I know of no one."

"And it is evident nothing is known at this end of the line, for I've been through two campaigns of ink-slinging and mud-flinging and no allusion to anything of this nature has been made, so I guess I'm immune."

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“Won’t my coming be likely to cause comment, or arouse suspicion?”

“I can take care of that. Since you and I are the only ones who know the inside facts, how are they to become known?”

He looked steadily at his son, as he added, with emphasis: “You are a Denning, and a Denning never yet went back on one of his own name and blood. So, as I said, there is no reason why events for ten years to come should not roll on smoothly as the stars in their courses, in accordance with my plans. There is one side; now, let us look at the other. It is doubtful if, under any circumstances, remarriage could be effected so privately but that the facts would leak out; under existing circumstances, they would be exaggerated, misrepresented, published far and wide, with the result that my family would be separated, my home broken up, my political prospects ruined, my social and financial standing lost—in short, I would be an outcast—and for what good? My children would be legitimized in the eyes of the law, but in the eyes of the world the stigma would remain the same. Now, candidly and fairly, which course is likely to bring the most happiness, the greater good, not to my daughter alone, but to all of us, including yourself and myself?”

One of Denning’s political opponents had once said of him: “He should have been a lawyer; when he states his side of the case, there simply isn’t any other side left; he’ll make you believe black is white, every time.”

The younger man was silenced, though unconvinced; he felt that he was right and his father was

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wrong, but that further appeal was useless. He made only one attempt.

"Your supposition is based only upon the most favorable conditions. What would result in case of your sudden demise and investigations that might follow?"

"Everything will be arranged so that no investigation will be necessary. The law will have nothing to do with the disposal of my estate. My first business will be to make a will, providing a certain interest for my wife, and making an equal division among my three children, and my executor can be trusted to see that my last wish is carried out."

Denning had risen with the last words and was walking back and forth. He stopped, laying a hand on the other's shoulder.

"And now, my son, I am going to see Helen and prepare her for meeting her brother, and she will then entertain you while I attend to some work."

"I have taken more of your time than I expected," said the other, looking at his watch; "it is later than I thought."

"Our interview naturally has taken considerable time—ah, what have you there, a portrait? By the way—it hadn't occurred to me before—are you married?"

"No. This is my mother's portrait."

"Your mother's? May I see it?"

As he placed the watch in his father's hands, he heard a swift, smothered exclamation. Denning studied the picture silently; time-hardened though he was, he felt something of the old spell of those tender, wistful brown eyes. There was even a shade of

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regret in his tone as he returned the watch to his son :

“She was scarcely more than a child when I knew her. I had no idea she would develop into so beautiful a woman. Excuse me, I must go to Helen.”

“Pardon me ; how will you explain this situation to her ? She has seen this portrait.”

“Helen !”

“Yes, she saw it incidentally—as you did now—and I naturally explained whose it was.”

“Well,” said Denning, after a pause, “it can’t be helped now. I am glad you told me. I wouldn’t want her to find me trying to deceive her ; and I doubt if I could have deceived her, I never have yet—never have even attempted it.”

“And you expect her to consent to your keeping this matter a secret, as you intend to do ?” the younger man exclaimed, incredulously.

“I think,” said Denning, with studied deliberation, “she will consent to what is for the best interests of all concerned ;” and with these words, he left the room.

XX

A REVELATION

AFTER the first shock of surprise on learning that Helen must be told the facts in the case, Denning felt a positive relief. He had dreaded the inevitable interview with her. He could not look into her eyes with a direct lie on his lips ; he knew that evasion or prevarication would not avail with her, and the question of what was to be revealed and what concealed had been a difficult one to decide. Now, he would state the facts—slightly euphemized—and trust the results to her love for him.

It seemed comparatively easy as he closed the door between himself and his son ; it seemed less easy when he stood before the door of the drawing room in which Helen was seated. He had traversed only a narrow passage-way, but his mind worked swiftly and a number of unpleasant possibilities had occurred to him.

He pushed aside the heavy curtain and stepped within. Helen was gazing pensively out of the window, an open book, unheeded, on her lap. She neither saw nor heard him, but that sense as yet unnamed told her of his presence and she turned expectantly toward him, with something like suspense in her face.

“ Father, dear, what has happened ? ”

She rose quickly to meet him. He came forward

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and, without speaking, took both her hands in his and pushed her gently back into her chair ; then drew another chair beside her.

“Helen, do you remember my telling you once, years ago, that I had done what I thought was right, but that I might have made mistakes and some day people might say I had done wrong?”

Strange ! She had been recalling that very conversation and the promise she had given him.

“Yes, I remember,” she replied in a low, but steady voice.

“I said nothing definite at the time, for I hoped I might never have occasion to allude to the matter again, but circumstances compel it now. I made at one time, Helen, a terrible mistake. Something which I did, supposing it to be perfectly legitimate and right, owing to conditions of which I had no knowledge at the time, proved to be wrong, an irretrievable wrong—something which the law calls a crime—and yet, I committed it unintentionally, unknowingly. Do you see the situation, Helen?”

“I do, father.” She had grown very pale, but her tones were steady and composed. “But you are at least morally innocent so long as the wrong was unintentional.”

“Granted, Helen ; but that doesn’t lessen the wrong done others, and might have very little weight with the public, were the facts to become known.”

“Oh, was the wrong one that involved others? Have others had to suffer for this mistake?” she asked, a new element of dismay in her tone.

“Others were wronged, Helen, but, so far, no one has suffered, for the reason that the facts, as yet, are

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not known, and it is only in the event of their becoming known, that any harm can result. Wait, dear; hear me through. If I, in an attempt to right this matter, were to make the facts known to the parties wronged, it would only bring wretchedness and misery into the balance of their lives and mine. Under such conditions, I have considered myself justified in keeping silent, and I am only speaking of this to you because circumstances have arisen which compel my doing so."

Helen felt that her intuitions were about to be verified.

"Of course, I don't know the situation," she said, "I can't even conceive what it can be; but father, I can't believe that any conditions would justify the concealing of a wrong, especially one in which the interests of others were involved. One question, first, please,"—she saw that he was about to speak—"You have had a caller, on business;—have you not?—has that anything to do with this matter, this wrong which you say is unknown?"

"It has everything to do with it," Denning replied, surprised. "But what do you know regarding my caller? Have you seen him? Do you know who he is?"

"I met him at the station where we stopped last and he told me he had business with you. I don't know him, except that"—she met her father's searching gaze calmly—"he is the one who saved my life in the wreck,—did you know that?"

"Yes, I learned it incidentally. You did not ascertain the name of your 'hero' then? I would suppose you would have done that."

"He was unwilling to give his name."

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Denning silently drew her to him with unusual tenderness.

"Does he know this—this secret?" she asked, dreading the reply.

"Yes."

"And does he approve of keeping it a secret?"

"I believe he thinks, as I do, that it is the only course to pursue. But I came here, Helen, to tell you the facts in the case; when you have heard them you can judge for yourself. You should be a competent judge, for you are one of the wronged parties; I only hope you will be a merciful one, likewise."

"I!" she exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes; you, your mother and your brother, Kingsley are the ones I have unintentionally wronged."

Something in his tone and manner awakened in her a strange foreboding of some evil beyond her thought; she waited silently for him to proceed.

"I couldn't look you in the face after what I am about to tell you except for the fact that, as I say, I sinned unknowingly. When I married your mother, Helen, I did so with as honorable intent as ever a man had. But there had been a chapter in my life of which no one—not even my friend Hollingshead—had any knowledge; a chapter which I supposed was forever closed and sealed. Years before, while I was a young man, I contracted an unhappy marriage. It was an unfortunate affair for both parties and we very soon separated. I went to South America and was there for ten years. After my return, I learned—incidentally, but on good authority—that the woman whom I had married was dead, had died during my absence. That was all I knew or cared to know. I

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did not think then I would ever care to remarry. Afterward, I met and married your mother. Not until years after,—when you had grown to womanhood—did I learn of the fearful mistake I had made. Then it was I discovered that the other woman—my first wife—was still living.”

Denning heard a gasp, a smothered exclamation, and hurriedly continued his narrative: “I discovered it through the very man who had told me years before of her death; he had learned his mistake, and on meeting me after all those years, told me, not knowing in either instance that the woman was my wife. Talk about the irony of Fate!”

So unexpected had been the nature of the revelation that Helen was at first stunned, bewildered, but she soon recovered her faculties and began to grasp the full significance of the situation; her mother’s false position, her brother’s, her own—so long as she was believed to be Denning’s child. In the light of this revelation, the look of amazement and pain in her companion’s face, on his learning that she was Denning’s daughter, took on a new and bitter meaning. No wonder he had seemed suddenly estranged! No wonder that his words at parting had seemed to imply that their pleasant relationship was something of the past! Her cheeks flamed at the thought, her temples throbbed with shame and humiliation, her eyes filled with burning tears of mortification that pride alone kept from falling.

“From that day to this,” Denning was saying, “I have lived with this secret hanging over my head, not knowing what a day might bring forth; knowing only that so long as there was no remedy for the

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evil, the only safety for my family or myself lay in silence."

"But father, *is* there no remedy?" Helen demanded earnestly, sitting suddenly erect before him with burning cheeks and shining eyes.

Denning was disappointed; he had appealed to her sympathy, but only her sense of justice was aroused.

"Yes," he said, sitting back in his chair and facing her with a touch of defiance in his manner; "there is a remedy. I have to-day received word of my first wife's death. I am now entirely free from that marriage——"

"Was *that* your visitor's errand?" she interposed in astonishment.

"Yes. As I said, I am free. The rest is easy. Simply to confess to your mother what I have already told you; receive her full and free forgiveness, have a joyful remarriage and live in felicity ever after."

At the mention of her mother's forgiveness, Helen suddenly recoiled; now, as the bitter, sarcastic tones ceased, she buried her face in her hands.

After a moment of silence, Denning spoke her name gently:

"Helen!"

There was neither response nor movement on her part.

He raised her head, drawing it against his shoulder.

"Helen, I did not mean to hurt you; I only intended to show you the futility of your hope, the hopelessness of the situation from that standpoint."

She lifted a pale, despairing face, her eyes tearless and heavy with pain.

"I see it all," she replied wearily; "Mamma

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would never forgive you. It would break up our home and spoil all our lives,—and yet—I suppose we ought to do right at any sacrifice.”

“Not when practically the same end can be attained without sacrifice,” Denning replied decisively.

Briefly he went over much the same argument he had used with his son, until Helen, like him, was silenced though unconvinced.

“And now,” said Denning, “I have promised my visitor—and your recent travelling acquaintance—that you should entertain him while I attend to my work——”

“Won’t you spare me that, father?” Helen interposed, drawing herself up coldly. “You surely cannot expect me to meet him, knowing the situation as I do now—and that he knows it also.”

Denning smiled for the first time during the interview :

“I want you to meet my son, Helen.”

“Your son !”

“My son and your brother, Thomas Macavoy Denning, Jr.”

In the sudden overturning of her preconceived ideas by this announcement, Helen felt for an instant as though in a state of mental chaos. As the atmosphere cleared, however, her thoughts reverted to that scene aboard the train just before the wreck ; the portrait her companion had shown her, his words concerning his mother and her recent death, and of the father he had never known—and all was clear.

“He came to me,” her father was saying, “in fulfilment of a pledge given his mother ; with a message

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from her which he had promised to deliver to me in person, after her death."

Helen scarcely heard. Other memories of that journey were crowding upon her thoughts, and with this new knowledge had come another explanation of the change which had seemed so mysterious. Again her thoughts brought the deepening color to her cheeks, but from a far different cause than shame.

"I will call your brother now," her father said, rising, "and leave him in your care for a while."

"But," she protested, half laughing, "he is not my brother, you know ; not really."

"Am I not your father, Helen ? or do you intend to repudiate me now ?" He asked the question playfully, but with a slight accent of reproach.

"Haven't I given my promise to stand by you, daddy dear !" she replied, using the familiar term of her childhood. "And haven't I heard you say that no Denning ever yet went back on his word ?"

"If you are a Denning, you are his sister," he retorted, adding more seriously : "He so considers you, Helen, and I think it best he should. You will naturally seem nearer to him if he regards you as his own flesh and blood."

"And likewise be guilty of obtaining his regard 'under false pretences' ;" she laughed a little nervously. "I will accede to your wishes, however, unless"—with an inscrutable little smile—"it should prove too much of an imposition for my conscience to allow."

When she found herself alone, her smile deepened.

"We will await developments, Mr. Denning, Jr.," she soliloquized. "If I really 'seem nearer' to you as

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a sister and you are perfectly satisfied with that sort of relationship, you will never learn the truth from me; otherwise,——”

The sound of returning footsteps cut short the second premise. She rose from her chair as her father entered, standing with perfect composure as he presented his son. Her color changed as their eyes met, but that was the only sign of agitation on her part. He was pale, and his dark eyes, shadowed with gloom, had in them a look of appeal.

“Macavoy, your sister, Helen. I don’t imagine from what I’ve heard that you require a very elaborate introduction, and I will ask you both to excuse me for a while, as I have some business demanding immediate attention.”

They both felt a sense of relief when left alone. To young Denning himself, his father’s presence just then would have seemed intolerable.

Helen, with a smiling gesture, indicated the chair beside her which her father had vacated, saying with an attempt at lightness, as she seated herself :

“Fate has played us a strange trick and it appears that we must adapt ourselves accordingly.”

“We do seem to be puppets in her hands to-day,” he replied rather bitterly.

“But I think her stock of surprises must be about exhausted by this time,” she rejoined, as cheerfully as possible, conscious at the same time that she herself could give the young man at her side a surprise that would fittingly climax the rest. “And since she has given us each such a very unexpected rôle, it is at least fortunate that we have met before, that we don’t have to begin as strangers.”

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“Do you consider our former meeting fortunate in the light of—of what has occurred since?”

He was verging towards dangerous ground; she must ward him off.

“It certainly was fortunate for me,” she replied; “I probably would not be here now, but for that.”

She regretted having said it when she saw the look of pain caused by her wilful misapplication of his words.

“That was not in my thoughts at all,” he answered gloomily, “and I wish you would please not mention it again. Do you mean to say,—Miss Denning,” he continued, coming closer, his eyes searching her face, “do you mean to say that you can recall the past without regret?”

Helen’s color deepened as she paused before replying: “You must not misunderstand me,” she said gently, the blue-veined lids with their upward curling lashes veiling the brown eyes from his scrutiny.

“I think I am only doing what you seemed to wish. Your parting words, as we separated this morning, were that you hoped I would think kindly of the past. I do remember it kindly and”—she hesitated, lifting her eyes fearlessly, but with a look in them he could not fathom—“*without regret.*”

Her eyes robbed her words of the sting they might otherwise have contained; he looked relieved, but unsatisfied.

“I don’t want to misunderstand you,” he said slowly, “but I am sure I do not understand you, Miss Denning.”

“Possibly you will later, as we become better acquainted,” she replied in a lighter tone. “At present,

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we must adapt ourselves to present conditions, and as a first step on your part, you must call me just plain 'Helen.' "

"Thank you," he smiled, "that should be easy."

"But it's not so easy for me to decide what to call you," she rejoined; "'Macavoy' seems to belong so essentially to father, while to call you 'Thomas,' would be to relegate you to ages past and gone; that has been our grandfathers' name, you know, from generation to generation."

"No, I did not know," said the other, "I have no knowledge whatever regarding my father's family. I have usually been called 'Tom,' having always lived where I was known from childhood."

"'Tom';" she repeated reflectively; "I like that; it has a companionable sound; reliable, too. Names are usually suggestive of character to me. 'Ned' for instance, always suggests sociability, an all-round good fellow; 'Harry' and 'Dick' jolly, devil-may-care fellows, but not half bad, after all. But 'Tom' ought to be a good, staunch comrade; the sort, you know, one could depend upon—if trouble came."

She uttered the last words half under breath, with an involuntary glance at her companion's face, and he read in her eyes, something between an appeal and a challenge.

"You can depend upon me, Helen, if trouble comes," he replied quickly, adding: "My father told you my errand,—did he not?—to try to avert the possibility of trouble for him and his?"

"He said something regarding your bringing a message, from your mother; but nothing as to its import."

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He hesitated a moment ; then drawing the letter from his pocket, placed it in Helen's hands, saying :

"There is the message ; read it for yourself. It will tell you, better than I can, my reason for what I have done to-day."

"But Tom,—your mother's letter to your father—her husband—ought I to read it?"

"I would rather you did. It may tell you—what I cannot ; and because of what is past, I would like you to know all."

She opened the letter and began reading, the young man watching her meanwhile. After the first few lines, she stopped ; her eyes met his wonderingly, inquiringly.

"My father said in speaking of his first marriage, that it was unhappy, an unfortunate affair, and that they separated, but"—she glanced again at the page before her—"this does not read like a separation, mutually agreed upon. Did he—did my father desert her?"

"He did."

"How long had they been married?"

"About a month."

"Oh !"

It was hardly an exclamation ; it sounded more like a low moan, as though she were hurt. She resumed her reading, continuing, without further question, to the end. When she had finished, her hands, still holding the letter, dropped to her lap and she sat with face averted, looking out of the window but seeing nothing. When she again faced him, her eyes were misty and her lips trembled slightly as she spoke.

"And your mother, after thirty years of desertion,

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wrote that letter to the man who deserted her, in the hope of righting matters for him and for his family!"

"That was her sole object. She tried to do all she could to right the wrong."

"She not only forgave him, but asked his forgiveness, dear heart! Think of it!" and with a hasty, surreptitious dab, Helen whisked away a tear that glistened on the curling lashes.

"Helen," said the other earnestly, "cannot my mother's wish be consummated? Cannot this matter be set right, quietly, and without the publicity and evil results which my father fears? What is your candid opinion?"

Her eyes met his frankly but sorrowfully: "You have trusted me and I will trust you, Tom. It could be set right, if—if my mother were like your mother."

After a moment's silence, she continued: "If father had told my mother when he first learned—of the mistake, you know—it might perhaps, have been different, though, of course, she would have left him then. But now,—she would never forgive him!"

As she returned the letter, she remarked with a smile: "What a strange errand for you! Such a message, and to a father whom you had never seen!"

"I don't mind confessing to you," he replied, "that up to a certain point, I was simply acting in deference to my mother's wish, her request; I had little personal feeling in the matter."

"Until—when?" she inquired.

"Until I learned—who you were. Then, I had a

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double incentive, never imagining for a moment there would be any obstacle in the way of its accomplishment. I think," he added sadly, "if I could have seen the absolute failure it would prove, I would have been tempted to turn back with my commission unfulfilled."

"I am very glad you did not," she replied quietly, but with unmistakable emphasis.

He was puzzled at her words. Conscious of his own bitter sense of disappointment and personal loss in this new relationship, he felt an added pain at finding no indication of regret on her part. Had she failed to understand him in the past? That could not be possible. He watched her in silence, for a while; then leaning forward for a better view of her face, said, "Helen, my father has asked me to stay—permanently—in Rockland."

He saw a flash of surprise and a wave of color, but her eyes dropped before his earnest gaze and the flush receded like a spent wave on the shore, leaving her cheek almost colorless. He could not tell whether it meant pleasure or pain.

"He has offered me the position of cashier in his bank," he continued, "if I will remain. I demurred at accepting, but he would not let me give him a final answer to-day. There are reasons for and against my remaining. There are reasons why I do not feel like making the decision entirely for myself. Will you help me in this decision?"—he bent closer—"Will you let me know your choice?"

"It is not necessary now," she replied in low, steady tones, but without looking up, "since you have time in which to give your answer. Perhaps, after

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a few days, you will be able to decide for yourself. without any—suggestion—from me.”

“It isn’t so much that I am unable, as unwilling, to make the decision myself. You must understand me, Helen ; you surely will not refuse.”

“I haven’t refused.” She smiled as her eyes met his.

“Then you will help me? You will give me your choice—honestly and candidly—when I ask it?”

“I will, since it is your wish.”

Having gained her promise, he was forced to be content, though he was none the wiser.

XXI

“EVERY MAN HAS HIS PRICE”

NEARLY a week passed and the matter of young Denning's permanent stay in Rockland was still undecided. Two or three times he had broached the subject, in conversation with his father, but the latter, detecting a reluctance on the part of the other to accept his proposition, urged a few days' longer delay. Aside from his personal feeling in the matter, the younger man feared that his presence in Rockland might tend to precipitate the very crisis his father was determined to avoid.

Denning himself at first may have felt the same apprehension. It certainly was not without some trepidation that he awaited the results of his interview with the reporters who boarded the private car a few miles outside of Rockland, eager for his views on the political situation. Denning had made a study of newspaper men and was popular with them. They got his opinions of the political outlook and a “scoop” besides. He stated a few facts,—frankly and fearlessly as though there were nothing to conceal—but in a way that he knew would lead them to draw certain inferences quite wide of the real truth. As a result, the evening papers informed the public that :

The Hon. Thomas Macavoy Denning returned this afternoon from a tour throughout the State. He

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reports most favorably upon the political situation. Everything points to a decisive victory at the coming election.

Mr. Denning was accompanied throughout his tour by his daughter, Miss Helen Denning, and on his return trip by Mr. Thomas Macavoy Denning, Jr., a son by a former marriage, who has heretofore made his home in the East. Owing to some domestic difficulty in his early married life, Mr. Denning went to South America and engaged in business for a number of years. While there, his son was born, but as Mr. Denning was not at that time in communication with his family, he knew nothing of his birth, or of the mother's consequent death, until after his return to the United States, several years later. Naturally, on account of unpleasant associations, he felt little desire to see the child. At the same time, business called him West, where he has since remained, with the result that, though contributing to the support and education of his child, father and son had never met until within the last few days.

Mr. Denning, Jr., is a man verging toward thirty, of most prepossessing manners, and the resemblance between him and his father is most striking, not only in personal appearance, but in their individual tastes as well, extending even to business life ; the son having entered a bank immediately upon his graduation from college, where he has steadily risen to the position of head cashier.

Mr. Denning is anxious to have his son remain in the West and with that object in view, has, we understand, made him a handsome offer ; but the latter wishes to look around a little before coming to a decision. It is to be hoped that Mr. Denning, Jr., will decide to remain with us, as he will prove a valuable acquisition to Rockland, both socially and financially.

An additional pleasant feature of this first meeting between father and son was furnished by the discovery that the latter was the unknown hero who, by his

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bravery and forethought, saved the life of Miss Denning in the recent railway disaster, and whose name she was then unable to ascertain. Of course, neither, at the time, dreamed of the relationship between them, but upon their introduction as brother and sister, this additional discovery was made.

In the case of his wife, Denning was careful to forestall the newspaper account with a version of his own, similar to the one given the reporters, but more elaborated. As she was not gifted with acumen, her suspicions were not easily aroused. The present fact of another son, who, as the elder, might in some ways be given precedence over her own, was of far more vital importance in her eyes than the past fact of a prior marriage and its outcome, whether happy or otherwise.

“Why have I not known this before?” she demanded. “Why have you led me to believe by your words and actions, all these years, that Kingsley was your only son?”

“I suppose,” said Denning, with an air of abstraction, “it was the natural and unconscious effect of my own attitude in the matter. Owing to unpleasant associations, which I have no wish to recall,”—he drew a heavy sigh—“the thought of the boy as my son so seldom occurred to me, that I was, as you might say, to a certain extent at least, unconscious of his existence until he recalled himself to me. I had, in fact, so completely forgotten him that it really gave me something of a shock when he announced himself.”

“He showed decidedly poor taste, I should say, to recall himself under such conditions; but probably his

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father's millions proved too strong an attraction for him to remain longer in the background."

"There's where you are entirely wrong, Marian. He is in perfectly independent circumstances and absolutely refused any favors. He has no need of me, but I do need him in my business and I have made him a good offer——"

"Which he has undoubtedly accepted!"

"Not yet, but he will if I can persuade him to do so. He is a splendid business man—just the sort of son I had always hoped for," he could not refrain from adding.

"How fortunate! I congratulate you. If he is so entirely independent of you, what was his object in introducing himself to your notice?"

"Perhaps to gratify a natural curiosity, as much as anything," was the indifferent reply. "I didn't inquire definitely into his reasons for coming; it's enough for me that he is here, and he will remain here if it is in my power to keep him."

In his private sitting room, Denning found his son and Helen, each with an evening paper. The former did not speak as he entered the room, and the face behind the printed sheet was cold and forbidding. Helen looked up from her reading with a little flash of indignation in her eyes.

"Father have you seen the *Bulletin*?" she inquired quickly.

"I glanced at it on my way up; why do you ask? Isn't it all right?"

"In the main; but there are some things in it absurdly untrue. Surely, you did not give them authority for those statements?"

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“My dear, you should know—and I’m sure Macavoy does know—that newspaper men make up their ‘stories’ pretty much to suit themselves, using the facts given them merely as a foundation on which they rear the superstructure that best pleases their fancy. I gave the boys nothing but facts, and really I thought they had done a very creditable piece of work. What do you think of it, Macavoy?”

“It is better than I expected,” his son replied calmly, but with an emphasis on the last word that Helen understood and that brought a flush of mortification to her cheek for her father’s sake.

“Are you used to dealing with those fellows?” Denning asked his son.

“Reporters? I’ve had considerable experience with them.”

Denning rehearsed the main points which he had given in that day’s interview.

“I think,” he said in conclusion, “that we had both better stick pretty closely to the same general outline. Those will do for the main facts; of course, you can add any little embellishments you please.”

“The plain facts will do for me,” Macavoy replied dryly. “I will leave the ‘embellishments’ to you; I think they are more in your line than mine.”

Denning laughed, but a trifle uneasily; and went to his dressing room to prepare for dinner.

Helen, who had again taken up the paper, suddenly glanced at Macavoy in time to catch the slightly satirical smile with which he answered his father.

“How stupid I have been!” she exclaimed.

“You surely cannot have discovered that in the

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Bulletin," he replied, laughing, "or if you have, the article is certainly libellous."

"No, I plead guilty," she answered; "I don't know whatever possessed me to be so dense. Do you know, from our first meeting, there was something familiar in your face—at times, not always. It recalled some memory, but so dim and fleeting, I couldn't fix it. Now I know what it was. This speaks of your striking resemblance to father; I don't see much resemblance between you as he looks now, but when you look stern and determined—or as you did a minute ago—you remind me of father as he looked when I first saw him, years ago you know."

His dark eyes regarded her quizzically: "When you first saw him!" he repeated incredulously; "Pardon me, but you must have a remarkable memory if you can recall your first sight of your father!"

"How delightful to have a teasing big brother at last! Something for which I've always envied my girl friends," she rejoined, laughing at the absurdity of his suggestion and coloring with vexation to find she had so nearly betrayed herself; "I intended to say, as I first *remembered* him."

"My mother always told me I resembled my father," he said gravely, after a slight pause; the allusion to the relationship seemed to have sobered him.

"And she, of course, remembered him only as a young man. He has changed greatly in the past few years, in appearance and—in other ways."

Helen added the last words in a lower tone as Denning himself re-entered the room, but Macavoy heard

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the unconscious sigh that accompanied them and drew his own inferences.

The *Bulletin's* news awakened general surprise in Rockland that evening. It was the topic in homes of widely differing conditions, at the clubs, in shops, stores and offices, and called forth varying comment.

It reached the editorial “sanctum” of the Rockland *Independent*, a sheet claiming, as its name indicated, independence of party control, but which was generally understood to be merely awaiting the highest bid before finally committing itself. The syndicate in charge of its financial affairs had selected for editor, one Meyers, former secretary of Mayor Denn- ing, as the man best fitted not only to pursue a strictly impartial and non-committal course until it was ascertained to a certainty—in the parlance of the syndicate—“which way the cat would jump,” but also to assist in hastening the movements of the aforesaid metaphorical feline.

Meyers skimmed hastily through the paragraph relating to the political outlook.

“Vague ; nothing definite yet,” was his mental comment.

The next three or four lines aroused his interest, however, and he read what followed with close attention.

As he read, a certain scene which he had carefully treasured in the storehouse of his memory—placed ready to hand and labelled “for future use,”—came forth and linked itself with the printed story. He saw again the mayor's waiting room as distinct as though the scene had occurred only yesterday. He could even recall each piece of furniture in its

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respective position and the early afternoon sunbeam that strayed through the western window and falling athwart a cut-glass paper weight, had thrown a circle of prismatic colors on his desk, the outline of which he had idly traced while listening to the talk between the mayor and his guests, as they returned from lunch. He heard again the drawling tones of Richards as he told his story, recalling even his idiosyncrasies of speech. He saw Denning's white face and beaded brow as he listened, and the look of slowly gathering comprehension in the face of his friend, Hollingshead. He recalled each detail of the narrative and made a swift calculation and comparison of dates,—how well they dovetailed together, the story told then and this of the printed page! At the slight points of difference, Meyers smiled significantly.

“Revised for publication,” he commented.

He clipped the paragraph from the paper and fastened it in his private note-book, jotting down a few stenographic characters on the blank page opposite. As he snapped the elastic band about the book and returned it to his pocket, the business manager entered from an adjoining room.

“Denning got back this afternoon.”

“So I see,” Meyers replied, getting up and closing his desk.

“Sprung sort of a surprise on the public, didn't he?”

“On some people, maybe. It's my opinion, though, that the most surprised one of the lot was Denning himself.”

“Think the story sounds sort of fishy, eh?”

“It's all right, so far as it goes,” Meyers looked

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reflectively into his hat, “but some details seem to be omitted. I don’t think the young man came out here on his father’s invitation.”

“Paper states he has made him a fine offer to remain.”

Meyers turned, with his hand on the door-knob, a peculiar smile on his face: “We’ll wait and see how that offer materializes,” and he swung the door open.

“Hold on a minute, Meyers. Speaking of Denning, reminds me that Hunter wants us to investigate that bribery charge they’re getting ready to spring a week or two before election. He says there’s plenty of evidence against Denning in the southern counties and that we could unearth it better than they could. Think we better send a man down there?”

Meyers regarded the other rather contemptuously: “What’s the use? A charge of that kind against a man like Denning! It would slip off of him like water off a duck’s back. Look at the charges that have been brought up against him and he has not even taken the trouble to deny them. He can buy every court in the State—if he hasn’t done it already. There’s only one court can ever convict him.”

“What’s that?”

“Public Opinion—with a big P and O,” Meyers smiled significantly and shut the door between them.

“Macavoy,” said Denning, detaining his son a moment, as the latter was leaving his office one morning about a week after his arrival, “there is to be a meeting of the directors this afternoon at which I want to take up this matter regarding the cashier. I

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have already talked it over informally with a majority of them and they agree with me that Layton is not the right man for the place, while they are inclined to regard you favorably. I want to present the matter officially this afternoon and have a vote taken, calling for Layton's resignation and putting you in his place. I am sure you must, by this time, realize the advantages of such a position too well to refuse it."

"Father, I would like one question answered, before I make my decision," said the young man, after a pause: "Would you have made me this offer—with the special inducements included—if there were no secret between us, nothing in the past to be concealed?"

"That had nothing to do with my offer," Denning replied promptly. "Why do you ask such a question?"

"Because, as you are aware, you offered me an unusual salary,—a salary, I have since learned, greatly in excess of what Layton himself is paid—and naturally it occurred to me that you might have reasons for placing me under heavy obligations to yourself."

"And in that case, you would have refused the offer?"

"In that case, I would have refused the offer. I am not a man to be bought, even by my own father."

A cynical smile played around Denning's lips: "Most men say that—perhaps some honestly think it—but I believe every man has his price."

"You must have had experience in buying," said the son quietly.

"Perhaps;" Denning replied indifferently. "But," he added, "that has nothing to do with the

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case in hand. I offered you that salary for two reasons ; first, because you with your business experience will be worth that much to me as my representative in the bank ; second, the excess above Layton's salary I shall pay from my personal account, in consideration of what I owe you as my son ; in other words, what I have failed to do in the past.”

Macavoy turned slowly toward the door : “I will give you my decision this noon,” he said, and left the room.

He walked slowly up the street, leading out to the residential portion of the town, in deep thought, weighing the pros and cons of the question to be decided.

On one hand, a splendid position, with the prospect of speedy advancement ; more than that, of attainments such as he might not achieve in years elsewhere. In addition, there was the social standing to be considered. As he walked the street, the pleasant greetings from prominent business men, the bows and smiles from matrons and maids whirling past in stylish turnouts, reminded him that already, stranger that he was, he possessed a social prestige in this populous western city that never had been or could be his in the staid, conservative, eastern town from which he had come.

On the other hand, there rose the life-long bitterness against his father for his mother sake ; added to this, was a distrust of his father's methods. Already with his keen perceptions, he saw much even on the surface of which he heartily disapproved, and he suspected what lay below and beneath the surface. He doubted

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if, after all, he cared to be identified with his father ; the latter was playing a reckless game, staking even his own reputation and that of his family. If he lost, Macavoy did not wish to be involved in the inevitable crash that would follow.

And in addition to all the rest, was always the thought of Helen. While there was a certain pleasure in their daily association, it was too dearly bought and at the cost of too much pain ; and what made the pain the more poignant, each day forced upon him the conviction that she herself, as she had said, had no regret ; she seemed in no way conscious of loss, but content with their present relationship. And yet, so inconsistent was he, it was the thought of Helen which made him finally hesitate about declining his father's offer. Was it generous, because he felt that trouble was impending—to fall sooner or later as the result of his father's methods—to leave her, upon whom it would fall heaviest, to bear it alone ?

A familiar voice broke in upon his cogitations. Looking up, he saw Helen in a smart trap, reining her horse close to the curbstone. He sprang in beside her, and the fair face and laughing brown eyes routed his half-formed plan to decline the cashiership and leave Rockland on the afternoon train, even while emphasizing the wisdom of such a course.

After a brisk drive they reached home. Helen tossed the reins to the footman and she and Macavoy entered the house together. He went directly to the library, knowing it was usually deserted at that hour. There Helen found him a quarter of an hour later, standing in the bay window, his hands clasped behind him, his head bent slightly forward, his face grave,

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troubled even. He was so absorbed in thought he did not hear her enter.

“Pardon me,” she said, with mock gravity, “can you tell me where I will find the gentleman who was driving with me quite lately?”

He turned, with a smile: “I don’t think he is far away.”

She looked relieved: “I wish you could have seen yourself! You looked as if you were contemplating some desperate deed.”

“I may have been: in fact, I think I was.” He laughed a little uneasily.

She glanced keenly at him for an instant; then waited for him to speak, but he said nothing.

“You have accepted father’s offer, have you not?” she asked indifferently, after a moment’s silence.

“No, why did you think so?”

“I just came from the bank, where father told me he expected to present your name to the directors this afternoon.”

There was another brief silence.

“I am to give him my decision after lunch,” he said finally, in a low tone.

The small clock on the mantel chimed for twelve forty-five.

“You haven’t much time left in which to decide,” she replied lightly, “I think I had better retire while you shape your future destiny. But be sure”—she gave him a tantalizing smile as she turned to leave—“that you shape it aright.”

He laid a detaining hand on her arm: “Helen,—have you forgotten?—you promised to help me decide.”

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"I promised to let you know my choice, if you asked it. But that shouldn't influence your decision. Think," she added teasingly, "how many promising careers have been blighted by unwise feminine counsels. Think what a bright future Adam had till it was ruined by following Eve's suggestions!"

He regarded this daughter of Eve thoughtfully, half-indignantly, for a moment. Her cheeks were still glowing from their drive and the golden hair showed the effect of the wind's caresses. Looking into the laughing eyes, a certain sense of absurdity suddenly struck him. How could she advise him? What did she know of his deeper thoughts and feelings? It was only too evident that she had had no thought of him save as a pleasant companion who helped while away the tedium of a long journey. His own face darkened and as it did, a softer light grew underneath the laughter in the brown eyes; a tender, misty radiance that pierced his heart with swift, poignant pain even while it drew him irresistibly toward her and made the struggle harder than before.

"I cannot decide by myself," he said in a low tone.

"Is it so difficult as that?" she asked. Something in her quiet tone stung him.

"It would be easy enough if there were nothing but the financial side of the question,—if there were no personal side," he retorted, almost angrily; "or even," he added, "if the personal side involved no one but myself."

"You would accept?" she queried, pleating the hem of a dainty handkerchief.

"From the financial standpoint? Yes; but—can't you see, Helen," he suddenly demanded; "what

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makes me hesitate? That there are personal reasons why I ought not to stay here, even though I am inclined to remain against my better judgment? You must know—you must understand.”

She colored under his searching gaze and also with the consciousness of what she was about to say.

“If the circumstances were precisely the same with the exception that I”—she hesitated slightly, laying the pleats in her handkerchief with greater exactness—“that I were——”

“That you were *not* my sister?” he finished in desperation, snatching the handkerchief from her hands and putting it in his pocket. “Would I stay then? I would, most emphatically. Nothing could drive me away from Rockland! Oh, Helen, don’t you see the utter unwisdom of my staying? You wouldn’t advise me to remain under such circumstances, would you?”

“I think,” she said, avoiding his eyes, “you had better leave me altogether out of the question.”

“What! and accept the position?”

“Yes.”

“Helen! do *you* advise that?”

“I am not going to answer any more questions; I must get ready for lunch—and you had better do the same,” she added significantly, turning to go.

“But Helen,—just a minute—you promised to tell me your choice. Is it your choice that I go, or stay?”

He had caught her hands and was watching her almost breathlessly.

“Stay,” she said, her eyes meeting his for an instant.

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She saw on his face a look of uncomprehending wonder, mixed with pain.

"Very well," he said passively, "that settles it;" and dropping her hands, he turned again to the window while she left the room.

Something in her eyes, even more than the spoken word, had turned him, against his better judgment. Perhaps, he reflected, his father was right after all, and every man had his price,—but not always in gold.

That afternoon, with due formality and deliberation, a vote was taken by the directors of the North Western National Bank of Rockland, calling for the resignation, within the next thirty days, of Layton, the cashier, and appointing young Denning to succeed him; the latter to enter upon his duties immediately upon the resignation of his predecessor.

Denning, upon returning home that evening, notified his son of the proceedings and the latter at once telegraphed his resignation to the eastern bank with which he had been for years connected. Layton, on receiving notification the following morning of the action of the directors, at once resigned; with the result that within little more than twenty-four hours after making his decision, young Denning was quietly installed in the new position without as yet, the public being the wiser.

That evening, at one of the clubs which his father frequented, he met Meyers for the first time. The latter had been for some days seeking an interview with the new comer, but moving as they did in entirely different circles, it had not been easy to accomplish. On this particular evening, however, happening to have business with one of the club

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members and seeing young Denning present in another part of the room, he asked to be presented. As his name was announced, the younger man glanced at Meyers' weazened face and stooped, shrinking form with that expression of half-tolerant indifference often tinged with mild curiosity with which a large dog regards the advances of a small one ; but at the supplementary words, “editor of the *Independent*,” his glance grew distinctly cold.

“I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Denning. Your father and I were quite closely associated at one time. You may have heard him speak of me.”

“I do not seem to recall the name,” the other replied civilly.

“No? Well, I suppose Mr. Denning's mind just now is more occupied with the present and the immediate future, than with reminiscences of the past.”

“Possibly.”

“Yes, I have known Mr. Denning quite intimately ever since he entered upon his political career ; in fact, I rendered him very material assistance in his first campaign.”

“Indeed !”

“Your father has had a remarkable career, Mr. Denning, he is a remarkable man and has a brilliant future.”

“He has been very successful.”

“You seem to have inherited his exceptional business ability.”

“I doubtless have inherited his business tastes ; our work is along the same line.”

“But it is rather unusual for so young a man to

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hold a position of such responsibility. Let me see, you are cashier, I understand?"

"Yes."

"Of what bank, may I inquire?"

The eyes, so like his father's, looked straight into Meyers' blinking, shifty orbs, with a glance that forcibly reminded the latter of the days of his secretaryship.

"Of the North Western, Mr. Meyers."

"What!—Beg pardon—the North Western, did you say? Not of Rockland!"

"Of Rockland."

"Why, what was the matter with Layton?"

"I know nothing regarding Mr. Layton except that he resigned."

"Resigned! It must have been very recent."

"Quite recent, I believe."

"Well, I am surprised. Was there any dissatisfaction?"

"I can give you no information as to that, Mr. Meyers." The young man's tone indicated that he was bored.

"A little political wire-pulling, perhaps," Meyers added insinuatingly.

"None whatever, so far as I know," the other replied, rising: "You will kindly excuse me, Mr. Meyers; I see a friend waiting for me."

"Certainly." Meyers also rose, smiling. "I congratulate you, Mr. Denning. I am very glad you are to remain in Rockland. Good evening."

With his peculiar smile, Meyers watched him cross the room: "So that is *his* price," he muttered, "the price Denning has had to pay for his silence. In my opinion it will cost the old man dear."

XXII

SETTING THE BALL IN MOTION

ALTHOUGH Meyers had failed to elicit from young Denning the information he sought, he yet had plenty of food for reflection as he wended his way from the club to the editorial rooms of the *Independent*. What he had particularly wished to ascertain was the exact *locus* of the young man's career before his entry upon the Rockland stage. So far, report only stated that he was from "the East." Meyers hoped to narrow this down to something more definite.

But his thoughts had now been partially diverted to another channel. Seated alone in his den, he ruminated until a late hour, and when he finally rose and closed his desk, his small, ferret-like eyes gleamed with something like satisfaction. Even then he stood for a few moments, with hands thrust deep in his pockets, absently jingling a few loose coins, lost in thought.

Then muttering : "I'll see Layton first and feel his pulse, I'll see him to-morrow," he turned off the light and left the room.

Rockland's Newspaper Row vibrated the following morning with the news of Layton's resignation and young Denning's appointment in his place. The agitation was only a mere ripple on the surface of the republican papers, which gave the news with little or

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no comment ; but rolled on with accumulating force until it broke, like a small tidal wave, over the columns of the *Chronicle*, the oldest democratic paper. Comment was not wanting here. The North Western—it said—which was well known to be the chief depository of the campaign funds of the republican county committee, as well as of a large share of the funds of the State committee, was to be congratulated on the personnel of its officials ; the inconvenience of a cashier whose affiliations were with the opposite party was, under these circumstances, only too obvious !

The *Independent*, from its vantage ground of strict neutrality, was not engulfed in any wave of partisan feeling. It alluded dispassionately to Mr. Layton's many years of efficient service in the position he had held ; and with equal calmness congratulated the North Western on its good fortune in securing a man of so marked ability to fill the vacancy caused by his resignation.

"I see you fellows are on the fence, as usual," said one of Rockland's leading politicians, as he entered Meyers' den and dropped into a chair conveniently near.

Meyers blinked and regarded his caller tentatively : "It's a good point from which to watch both sides," he ventured.

"A mighty ticklish position, I should say, but you're so used to it you could do the tight-rope act by this time. Now, Meyers, candidly, between you and me, what do you think of this fool act of Denning's?"

"Denning's?" Meyers repeated, feigning surprise ; "Layton resigned, I understand."

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"He resigned at the request of the directors," the other retorted with scorn. "That's straight from Layton himself, and Meyers, you and I know who has that board of directors under his thumb. They'd hand in their own resignations, like so many little men, if Denning told 'em to."

Meyers reflectively jabbed his pen two or three times into a sponge beside the ink-well, before replying cautiously: "If Denning brought about Layton's resignation, it was rather indiscreet, just at this time. Bad policy, very bad; Layton's popular."

"Not only that, it's a dead give away. Every one can see why it was done, with the campaign funds deposited in that bank."

Meyers examined his pen thoughtfully, but said nothing.

"Denning will find his mistake, too," the other continued. "He wasn't going to have any 'snap' anyway, with a man like Knox up against him, and now he'll find it will be the fight of his life. If he wins out, it will be by a damned small majority—and he deserves to lose."

Meyers put his pen in the rack, folded his hands and looked shrewdly at the man beside him, as though scenting his game.

"In other words, it wouldn't hurt your feelings if he did lose," he supplemented. "Speak out, Hughes; don't beat about the bush. We all know you're both after the same berth in Washington."

"That's about it, only he's going round Robin Hood's barn by way of the gubernatorial mansion, while I prefer the short cut," Hughes answered, laughing uneasily.

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He glanced about the room, drew his chair nearer to Meyers and continued :

“It’s this way ’twixt Denning and me. He’s got his friends and I’ve got mine. I and my friends were willing—like good Republicans—to help boost him into the governor’s chair, but no further. After that, ’twas to be a fight between us—fair and square—to the finish. But he ain’t willing to wait and fight fair. Right now, in this campaign, he’s pulling his wires for the senate ; not content with present issues, he’s monkeying with the State legislature, buying votes in every county, trying to keep my men out and crowd his men in. That’s where the funds in the North Western are going. I’m on to his deals——”

“So Layton is ‘squealing’ is he?” Meyers interposed, darting a sharp glance into Hughes’ face.

The latter nodded. “I guess Denning will find he’s locked the stable after the horse was stolen,” he chuckled ; then resumed : “Well, as I was saying, the fight is on between him and me, right here and now, and there’ll be no let up till I’ve knocked him out.”

“I’ll give you a tip, then, Hughes, that you’d better get your work in before next November, for if Denning wins out in this fight, you might about as well keep out of the ring in the next one.”

“In the senatorial contest?” Hughes asked anxiously. “You think I won’t stand any show?”

“Not against Governor Denning,” Meyers replied with emphasis : “That’s pretty well fixed ; that’s why he got you to agree to stand off in this bout, and that’s why he is fighting so desperately to get in.”

“Well,” said Hughes, with an oath, “he won’t get

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there if I can beat him by fair means or foul, I don't care which. And that's what I'm here for. I'm open to suggestions."

Meyers picked up a paper knife and twirled it slowly, Hughes watching him expectantly. The silence grew oppressive to the latter.

"Candidly now, Meyers; what do you think of his chances compared with Knox's? As you said when I came in, you're in a position to see both sides."

"Denning's a hard man to count on," Meyers replied non-committally, balancing the paper knife in his fingers, "you never know just where he's at. He generally has something up his sleeve."

"I've noticed," Hughes remarked significantly, "that you can usually produce a 'trump' when it's needed."

Meyers blinked, as he finally succeeded in balancing the knife in a vertical position on his finger tips, which operation Hughes watched with a sort of fascination, unconscious that the ferret eyes were fixed on his face.

"What would it be worth to you?" Meyers asked quietly, as the knife toppled over on the desk.

"Wh—what?" Hughes stammered, rousing from the semi-hypnotic spell and confronting the eyes.

"The 'trump,' what would it be worth to you?"

"A whole lot," Hughes answered emphatically, but ambiguously, adding after a slight pause, "I ain't talking in dollars and cents. I ain't in that line of business, you understand."

"Neither am I, for that matter."

"Is there anything in particular you'd like?"

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Hughes inquired desperately, after another eloquent silence.

“‘I’m open to suggestion,’ as you said a while ago.”

“Meyers,” said Hughes plaintively, “you can have anything you want.”

“Yes;” Meyers answered reflectively; “a six-year berth in Washington, with all its perquisites, is worth some concessions.”

It was evident to Hughes that he must take the initiative, but Meyers’ words had given him a cue.

“How would you like a six-year berth in Washington yourself?” he asked.

“That depends on the kind of berth referred to.”

“Well,—damn it!—as private secretary to a U. S. S.,—how does that strike you?”

“All right, provided it’s a sure thing.”

“I’ll make it a ‘sure thing’ provided you help me land a solar plexus blow on that fellow next election day.”

At this important juncture the annunciator beside the desk claimed Meyers’ attention. While he was still engaged, the door of the adjoining room opened and the business manager entered, so Hughes found his conference practically at an end. As he left the room, however, he gave Meyers a wink and the latter followed him to the door.

“You clear the track and grease the wheels to Washington, and you ride in the same coach; understand?”

“Agreed,” said Meyers, thrusting his hands in his pockets.

“I suppose you know how you’re going to play this hand?” Hughes remarked tentatively.

“Pretty near!”

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"Do we play partners, or do you 'go it alone?'"

"I think," Meyers said, after a pause, "that neither of us had better appear in it. It will be better for you with your political prospects—better for us both—if the 'solar plexus blow,' as you call it, is dealt by some one within the other party ; perhaps some one with a personal grudge against Denning."

"By George ! that's a good scheme. Layton's your man, eh ?"

"Possibly."

"Well, damned if I care who deals the blow, so long as it knocks him out !" and he turned on his heel, laughing.

Meyers stood for a moment, looking after him, his small eyes twinkling with self-congratulation.

"So much to the good that I hadn't counted on," he muttered, as he turned again toward his desk.

"What's Hughes after ?" inquired Todd, the manager.

"After Denning's scalp," Meyers answered, with a grin.

Todd laughed. "On the war-path, is he ?"

"Yes ; he's found out through Layton that Denning's getting in his work over the State for the senatorial contest next year, and he's going to get back at him."

"Denning's getting reckless ; he's taking desperate chances of late."

"'Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad,' " Meyers quoted sententiously.

"Speaking of Layton," Todd resumed, after a pause ; "I heard on the street an hour ago that the democratic State committee has got control of the *Bulletin*, and Layton's been given the management."

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"Whew ! You don't say ! Layton's going to beard the lion in his den, isn't he?"

"Looks that way. I happened to run across Denning half an hour later and hinted to him that the *Independent* was in the market. He didn't seem to catch on, however, and the next man I ran into was Bradenburg, who told me on the *q. t.* that Denning has bought up the *Standard*—owns the whole outfit—and is going to run it to suit himself."

Meyers looked at Todd with narrowing eyes : "I thought I was to have the say regarding the political stand of the *Independent*."

"That's all right, Meyers ; I only did it on the spur of the moment. Just thought I'd throw out the bait, and in case he did nibble, we'd make a big haul."

"And be bossed by Denning," Meyers added contemptuously. "You leave me to manipulate this, Todd ; we'll not only be our own bosses, but before next November, we'll boss the *Bulletin* and Layton and the committee itself."

"You don't mean it ! So that's the way the cat's going to hop, is it?"

"Yes, but hold your tongue and stick to the 'fence' for the present."

Meyers made a number of congratulatory calls that day. Meeting Denning on the street, he congratulated him upon his acquisition of the *Standard*, and a little later, in the office of that popular Republican paper, congratulated the editor and manager upon the new proprietorship, which he said was bound to make the paper more popular than ever. When he left the office, he assured the *Standard* of the entirely fraternal spirit of the *Independent*. He next extended his

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congratulations to Layton, whom he found installing himself in the offices of the *Bulletin*. Meyers drew from him an outline of the future policy of the *Bulletin* and its methods of procedure which he had mapped out for the coming campaign, and without directly committing himself, succeeded in conveying the impression that the new management could rely upon the *Independent* as a sort of "silent partner," to whom it might turn for timely suggestion and assistance in any emergency.

Later, in the evening, he invited one of the members of the North Western's board of directors to share with him some "liquid refreshment," who, under its mellowing influence, gave—quite incidentally, in response to Myers' congratulations upon the new cashier—what few facts he knew regarding the new comer, which included the name of the bank and the town from which he had come.

Meyers' closing act that night was to write and mail a brief letter to a private detective in the East, with whom he had once been associated in the earlier days of his somewhat checkered career. Having done this, he retired to rest with the satisfaction of having at last "set the ball moving."

XXIII

A SIDE ISSUE

WEEKS passed and October came with no material change in the political situation. The battle waged with increasing fury, but, as yet, there was no certain indication which side would eventually win. Meanwhile the flames of partisan feeling mounted higher and higher; their innumerable scorching tongues blackening and blasting men's reputations without partiality and without mercy. Friends became foes and foes changed to friends in the swift transmutations of political affiliations; and as the situation grew more strained, the terrible tension under which the participants were living became more and more apparent.

In Denning's case this was particularly true. The contest between himself and Knox—the principal figures in this arena—was closer than between any other two candidates. In addition, a spirit of personal animosity had been engendered between them which each day only intensified. But more than all, Denning was oppressed with the fear of his own secret—always hanging over him like the sword of Damocles—and with a horrible foreboding, born of an over-taxed brain and over-wrought nerves, that had of late taken possession of him; a sort of prescience of impending evil, haunting him day and night, harassing even his brief hours of sleep. It began to be evident

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to all that Denning was fighting with desperation, but only he himself knew that it was much of the time the desperate frenzy of a man who feels himself doomed.

It was small wonder, therefore, that the strain told fearfully upon him, as was evinced by his rapidly whitening hair, the deepening lines in his face, and the leaden dullness that at times clouded his once keen, clear eyes. In his family, the effects were even more noticeable. He was distraught, taciturn, irritable.

Early in October, Mrs. Denning announced her intention of taking a trip "up the sound," to visit friends in Victoria.

"I shall remain away until after election," she remarked to Helen, who was assisting in the preparations for departure; "I hope by that time your father will have regained his mental equilibrium so that he can resume his place in the family and in society. At present, he is nothing but a political monomaniac."

"Poor father! he is terribly worried," Helen answered with a sigh, "I hope he will win; it would be a crushing blow to him if he were to be defeated."

"In case he is not successful, you need not look for my return until after the holidays," her mother replied, with cool deliberation; "though, of course, it is unnecessary to mention it to any one at present."

Too much surprised to speak, Helen only looked at her mother in reproachful protest. Ignoring it, the latter continued:

"That is an additional reason for my going away. Your father doesn't appear like a man over-confident of success."

"And you would stay away from him just when he

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would be most in need of sympathy!" Helen cried indignantly.

"Don't be foolish, child. If your father were defeated I fancy I would be the last person he would care to see."

A conviction of the truth of her mother's words suddenly flashed upon Helen and she was silent.

"I would prefer that you should accompany me—in fact, I would insist upon it—except for one consideration," Mrs. Denning continued significantly, while Helen colored slightly; "It would hardly be fair to Mr. Russell after what he has said to me"—she watched the effect of her words—"to carry you away before his face and eyes. But I hope you will treat him with a little more consideration. He confessed to me that he had been greatly perplexed and troubled by your appearance of late, but I told him that politics had turned your brain as well as your father's."

"If I ever marry," Helen retorted, "it will be some one with nerve enough to pay his attentions to me, first hand, and not through my mother; but as for going away with you, I wouldn't think of it, Mr. Russell or no Mr. Russell. I shall stay by papa."

"Oh, that is to be expected, of course;" Mrs. Denning returned mockingly. "Well, there is a houseful of servants and Hobbs is far more than an ordinary housekeeper; she has known you from a child and looks after you almost as well as I do."

"I dare say she does," Helen replied coolly, "but I'm no child to be 'looked after.' Besides, I heard papa say that Uncle Dick and his wife were coming over, and I'll get him to ask them to stay. I'm sure they will."

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“Very well, if you fancy such an ordinary person as Mrs. Hollingshead. You always did have rather plebeian tastes ; I’m sure I don’t know where they’ll lead you yet. That reminds me, Helen ; does young Denning have any idea that you are not related to his side of the house ?”

“No,” Helen replied, bending over the trunk and stowing away a walking skirt with unnecessary vigor as an excuse for the blood which she felt flaming in her cheeks. “No, he is under the happy illusion that I am his really, truly sister, and papa thought best not to shock him by undeceiving him.”

“The most sensible decision I ever knew your father to make,” Mrs. Denning remarked, with a sigh of relief, serenely unconscious of the satire in Helen’s tones, while the latter gave the walking skirt an extra savage thrust.

To Denning, his wife’s departure was a relief. He was no longer compelled to meet her cold, half-averted glance, which, to his conscious guilt, seemed like an accusation. It was a removal of restraint also. He was no longer under the necessity of so carefully guarding his appearance. He absented himself more and more, returning home at a later hour each night, breakfasting by himself—or sometimes not at all—and then going out to begin the feverish round of another day. Helen saw him now but seldom, and on the rare occasions when she met him for a few moments, something in his appearance awakened within her a new fear, which she hardly dared formulate in words, even to herself.

Almost on the verge of collapse under the frightful double tension, haunted by that wretched, indefinable

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foreboding of failure which pursued him day and night, Denning was resorting to stimulants to temporarily clear his brain and steady his nerves, thereby aggravating the conditions he sought to relieve.

His son, who saw him more frequently, understood the situation, but was powerless to check the evil which he foresaw. All he could do was to fulfil his duty in his position as cashier of the North Western ; and this he found no sinecure, involving, as it did, the care of his father's personal account at this time, with his reckless, and sometimes wholly irresponsible, expenditures. To him, his father's ruin seemed little short of inevitable, but he resolved to stand by him till the crisis came, whatever it might be.

His greatest anxiety was for Helen. With a heavy heart he noted the look of wistful sadness that began to lurk in the brown eyes. She had grown strangely quiet of late and a sort of barrier seemed to have formed between them. He realized, with a sudden pang, that she considered him too remote to take him into her confidence in the agony of suspense, the torture of apprehension, which she was silently enduring ; while her very nearness to him, rendered him speechless. He longed to comfort her, to share her burden, but dared not trust himself to speak, knowing that the depths of his own feeling, like a resistless current, would carry him far beyond the limits which he had prescribed for himself.

One evening, however, soon after Mrs. Denning's departure, his self-enforced silence gave way. He was crossing the hall on the way to his father's sitting room when he met Helen, and her unusual pallor together with traces of recent tears, told him that she

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had come face to face with a phase of the situation new and terrifying to her, but one with which he felt he was becoming sadly familiar.

"Helen!" he exclaimed, stopping suddenly and looking searchingly in her face: "Something is troubling you to-night." He added gently, "Can't you trust me enough to tell me what it is?"

"Oh, Tom," she answered piteously, "it's so terrible I don't know how to speak of it. I can't bear even to acknowledge it to myself."

"Is it concerning father?"

"Yes."

"I think I know already," he replied, drawing her into the sitting room, where a fire was burning in the grate, for the evening was chilly.

He seated her in a low chair before the fire, but remained standing himself near her, his elbow on the mantel, his head on his hand, his eyes fixed on her face over which the firelight played fitfully.

"I think I know," he repeated gently; "I only hoped that you did not,—and might not—though," he added slowly, "I could not see what was to prevent your knowing."

"I have felt for days that something was wrong," she replied wearily; "father has appeared so strange of late, so unlike himself. I couldn't account for it, except on one supposition, and that was so awful I couldn't think of it; I wouldn't admit it as a possibility, even to myself, until—to-day—I *had* to."

"Poor child!" he exclaimed in answer to the unconscious pathos of those last three words.

"This morning, after you had gone and I had come upstairs to my room, I did not hear papa in his room,

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as usual, getting ready for breakfast. It was so still I was frightened, I was afraid he was ill, so I went to the door and knocked and called him. There was no answer, so I opened the door and saw, at a glance, he had not been there at all ; everything was just as the maid had left it yesterday. Then I was terribly frightened—for I heard him come upstairs between three and four o'clock this morning—and I came directly to this room, and—I found him."

At the little break in her voice, he turned his head and covered his eyes with his hand.

"Oh, Tom, I thought my heart would break ! Poor, dear daddy ! At first I didn't think it could be he——" a sob choked her.

"Don't, Helen ! Don't try to tell me, I know ;" he replied, his own voice unsteady from sympathy.

She sat leaning forward, her elbows on her knees, her head resting on one hand, gazing into the fire as she spoke. Now, she covered her face with her hands, but through her fingers, Tom caught the gleam of tears in the glancing rays of the firelight.

He came nearer and caressed the golden head, battling all the while with the fierce, almost uncontrollable desire to take her in his arms.

She raised her head, clasping her hands and gazing again into the fire.

"I fixed the pillows under his poor head, so he would look more comfortable and picked up things and turned off the lights—they were all burning brightly—and then I sat down beside him and waited for him to wake up."

"You shouldn't have done that, Helen ; it could do him no good, you know, and—it was bad for you."

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"Well, I did. He didn't waken till nearly noon, but when he did—I don't know which of us felt the worse!" she smiled forlornly at the recollection.

"But Tom," she looked up eagerly into his face, for he had gone back and was again leaning on the mantel, "he says it's only the result of this terrible strain; that he will be all right after election. Don't you think he will—I mean, of course, if he wins?"

"I hope so," he answered slowly.

She regarded him thoughtfully for a moment, then rose and came nearer.

"What is it, Tom? Do you doubt his winning, or do you think it would make no difference?"

He did not reply at once; when he did, it was with peculiar deliberation. "Sometimes I think, Helen, it would be better for him—for all of us—if he were defeated."

He saw in her eyes the question she could not bring herself to ask, and continued gently:

"It's a hard thing to say, Helen, of your father—and mine; but I think that under this strain he is becoming both mentally and morally unfit for the place he would have to fill, if elected."

"I have thought of that, too," she admitted falteringly, "but think what it would mean to him if he failed!"

"It would be a terrible blow to him, but what I dread more is the greater failure, in case he wins."

"Tom!" she cried, and he felt the pain that suddenly sharpened her tone, "you surely don't think father will continue—like this! He says he will be all right 'when things have resumed their normal conditions'; those were his words," she continued in a

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sort of protest against the reply she read in his face. "He even promised me that if he were elected, he would try and come to an understanding with mother—about his marriage, you know."

"Helen,"—he took her hands in his, hating himself for the cruel words he must speak—"he will never do that. The very fact of his making you such a promise shows that he was irresponsible at the time; he did not know what he was saying."

Her eyes fell and she tried to withdraw her hands, but he held them fast, and before the silent, pent-up anguish in her face, his self-imposed barriers gave way. He forgot everything but his love for her. His arms suddenly wound about her, straining her closer and closer to him, while he drew her head down upon his breast, bending his own head above it till his lips touched her hair and brow. But something in that touch recalled him, and, with a cry like one wounded, he as suddenly released her and quit the room.

Helen possessed a keen sense of the humorous in a situation and not even her grief over her father could restrain a faint smile as she looked after the vanishing figure. Perhaps the effect as a counter-irritant was to be desired. She sank upon the floor beside her father's couch near the fireplace and her overwrought feelings found relief in what she termed "a good cry."

XXIV

"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN"

THE following day Richard Hollingshead and his wife arrived. The Bonnibel having been sold years before to an English syndicate, Hollingshead, no longer detained in Henley, had established himself as a mining broker in one of the coast cities, at no great distance from Rockland.

Years of happiness had brought to him and his wife a spirit of good cheer which seemed always to diffuse itself among all with whom they came in contact and which made them doubly welcome guests in the Denning home at this time. Mrs. Hollingshead was also accompanied by Dot,—an exceedingly diminutive descendant of the beloved Psyche, long since deceased—who speedily became prime favorite with the entire household.

Hollingshead had seen the newspaper accounts of the arrival of Denning's son and with his previous knowledge of affairs, had a pretty thorough understanding of the present situation. He had been in Rockland but a few hours before he realized Denning's condition, and his frank friendliness would not allow him to remain silent.

"See here, Mac, old man, this won't do, you know," he exclaimed, the second morning after his arrival as, on entering Denning's sitting room, he found the latter taking a stiff "bracer" preparatory to going out.

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"I've got to do it, Dick ; I'm on the rack night and day and I've got to have something to keep me up."

"In moderation, Mac, but you're taking too much ; it's getting the best of you."

"No danger of that," said Denning confidently ; "I know what I'm doing. Under ordinary conditions it would be too much, I'll admit, but Dick, under this tremendous strain I've simply got to have it. I'll drop it, you know, when we get back to normal conditions."

"Mac !" Hollingshead interposed sternly, but putting his arm affectionately about the other's shoulder, "You are getting where you can't drop it. You are making a wreck of yourself. See how your hand trembles and you've aged five years since I saw you six months ago ; and it isn't the strain of this political campaign that's doing it, Mac, half so much as your own excesses."

"Dick," Denning protested piteously, "you don't know what you're talking about ; you don't know what I'm struggling under."

"I come pretty near knowing, old man. I know this much : that you could have gone through this political fight and it wouldn't have even fazed you, if it hadn't been for that other load you're carrying, and that's pressing a good bit harder since your son's coming out here. Mac, did you have to give him the place he holds ? I mean, did he make any demands on you ?"

"Demands ? No ! I almost had to get on my knees to him to get him to stay."

"It was a risky piece of business, Mac."

Denning groaned : "What else could I do ? I'd got

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to have some one to look after affairs at the bank, and he was the only one who could do it. Dick, I know no more to-day of what is going on in that bank—of the status of my own accounts even—than you do."

Hollingshead shook his head: "That isn't like you Mac. I wouldn't have believed it of you."

"I simply had to give it up," Denning replied wearily; then added with sudden pathetic earnestness, "Dick, it isn't the fight that's doing me up, nor is it the other thing you speak of. Something has got hold of me lately that's worse than all the rest put together. It's something indefinable,—I can't explain it—it seems a sort of presentiment of impending evil. I don't know whether it's a warning that I'm going to fail, after all—if I thought that, I'd never wait for election day to decide the matter; I'd end it all here and now——"

"Nonsense! Mac, don't talk that way!" Hollingshead interposed hastily; "This whole thing is getting on your nerves, that's all."

"Well, whatever it is," Denning replied gloomily, "when it gets hold of me, I'm done for till I can get something to brace me up. And it follows me day and night,—that sense of evil just ahead—it even haunts my dreams. In the little sleep I snatch before daylight I dream of walking along precipices, or beside open graves, expecting every step to pitch headlong, and wake with the cold sweat standing all over my body. Sometimes, Dick,"—he lifted his eyes to Hollingshead's face and the latter was struck with their haunted look—"sometimes I think I'm a doomed man; but I'm fighting for my life. I want you to stay by me, Dick, to see me through; but

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remember, it's life or death with me, according as I win or lose."

"You're getting morbid, Mac. You'll be all right if only you keep your head and don't let that stuff get away with you.—Mac, let up on that! You've had enough!"

Denning's only reply was to drain the glass he had just filled. Then he turned, facing his friend:

"Let me alone, Hollingshead. I'm a desperate man. I'd be a madman but for that. I've got to down these blue devils—or they'll down me—and that's the only way to do it."

Hollingshead sighed and turned away.

Half an hour later, he and Denning were seated together in the carriage, on their way downtown, the latter exhilarated, buoyant, recounting the indications of his coming victory.

If Hollingshead was quick to note what was amiss with Denning, his wife was equally keen in her observation of the young people. Since that evening when young Denning's feelings got the better of his judgment, there had been a marked change in his manner towards Helen. He avoided being alone with her and was silent and *distract* in her presence; while she, though trying in various ways to reassure him, was yet unable to rid herself of a certain constraint—born partly of his own manner—which almost unconsciously tinged her words and actions.

Of their interview that evening preceding her arrival, Mrs. Hollingshead, of course, had no knowledge; she saw only the results. But one or two shrewd questions, supplemented by her keen perceptive faculties, gave her an inkling of the situation.

“A WORD FITLY SPOKEN”

She was a firm believer in the efficacy of “a word spoken in season,” and was only awaiting her opportunity to say the word.

On the fourth day after her arrival, there was a drizzling rain, increasing towards night to a violent storm.

“Just the sort of night to be cozy and ‘comfy’ at home!” Mrs. Hollingshead remarked, as the family adjourned to the library after dinner.

“That’s what!” her husband responded with emphasis, stationing himself with his back to the open fire and surveying the cheerful apartment approvingly: “Mac, old man, say we drop politics for to-night and stay at home. There’ll be nothing doing a night like this.”

“Yes, do spend the evening with us, Mr. Denning. I’ve scarcely seen you since I came,” said Mrs. Hollingshead; while Helen’s eyes, meeting her father’s, added their silent appeal.

“That’s just where you’re mistaken, Hollingshead, if you think there’ll be any let-up for storms or anything else,” Denning answered in a low tone, as he passed the fireplace: “The ‘machine’ is running now to beat hell and nothing on earth can stop it.”

“Not so long as you’re a part of it, that’s certain,” the other retorted.

Denning came over to the table where Mrs. Hollingshead and Helen had seated themselves with their embroidery.

“I am sorry to seem remiss in my duties as host,” he said, smiling, “but I will have to ask your forbearance a little longer. After election, you know, Mrs. Hollingshead, I will try to atone for all seeming neglect.”

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"And the honor of being entertained by the governor-elect will, of course, be our compensation for waiting," she replied lightly.

"I hope so. Meanwhile,"—with a glance at his son who was standing near—"I deputize Macavoy here, to entertain you in my stead until I am at liberty."

"Oh, he has already thrown himself into the breach like a hero," she answered, laughing. "He was to have taken us to the theatre to-night, but it's so stormy, he's going to stay at home and read to us instead, aren't you, Tom?"

Though this was the first intimation he had received of any such arrangement, Tom—as he was now universally called in the home circle by all but his father—assented, glancing involuntarily at Helen as he did so; but her eyes were on her work.

"Oh," said Mrs. Hollingshead mockingly, "Helen is so engrossed with that pillow cover of hers, she won't know whether you're here or not. You are to read solely for the diversion and edification of Dot and myself. You will find us a very appreciative audience, I assure you."

"Well, Mac, if you are going downtown, I may as well go along with you," Hollingshead remarked indifferently, but with a significant glance at his wife, who nodded almost imperceptibly.

When they had gone, Tom seated himself at the opposite side of the table and began to read, Mrs. Hollingshead and Helen continuing their work, while Dot, with her small black nose on her paws and her eyes on Tom's face, seemed the most attentive listener of the three.

“A WORD FITLY SPOKEN”

For a time, all went well, but after a while, the reading dragged so obviously—reader and listeners seeming alike preoccupied—that at the first convenient stopping place, Tom closed the book and after a little desultory talk, sat gazing abstractedly into the fire.

“Dear me, Tom !” said Mrs. Hollingshead, breaking the silence as she stopped her work to thread her needle, “how much you resemble your father ! Don’t you think so, Helen ?”

“Yes ; as father looked years ago.”

“Oh, years ago, of course. When I look at him it fairly carries me back to the time I first met Mr. Denning, at Hampton Springs. You remember the Springs, don’t you, Helen ; that place where you and your mother were the summer before she married Mr. Denning ?”

Helen’s reply was inaudible, but Mrs. Hollingshead was conscious of a sudden movement on Tom’s part ; also of a warning kick, vigorously administered under the table.

“What is it, Helen ?” she inquired innocently ; “Oh, I had dropped my silk, hadn’t I ? Thank you, my dear.”

As she picked up the silk she had intentionally dropped, Mrs. Hollingshead moved her chair out of range of another similar warning.

“Yes,” she continued complacently, resuming her work and her reminiscences at the same time, “taken all in all, that was quite an eventful summer for such a quiet place ; and you—little chit that you were—were at the bottom of most of the happenings. Do you remember Mr. Denning’s snatching you out from under the railroad train that Sunday afternoon ?”

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"I don't think I would be likely to forget it," Helen answered in a low tone.

"And look at all that followed that escapade of yours! Mr. Denning straightway became infatuated with you, which resulted in his acquaintance with your mother and their marriage. Then Dick, dear old boy! whom everybody had given up for a confirmed old bachelor, finding himself left out in the cold, concluded of two evils to choose the less, and so he married me;—all because you ran away that afternoon after a lot of base-ball players and came within an ace of being run over! I should think you would feel weighed down with a sense of responsibility at all you've done."

"I do," responded a subdued voice, which seemed to vibrate between laughter and tears.

Mrs. Hollingshead glanced slyly at Tom. His abstraction had vanished. He was watching Helen with strained eagerness, his eyes strangely alight, but the latter was bending so closely over her work that only a very pink ear in a haze of golden hair was visible from where he was sitting.

"Mercy me!" Mrs. Hollingshead suddenly exclaimed. "If it isn't past Dot's bedtime and the poor little dear is sound asleep! I must put her to bed," and picking up the unconscious little creature, she unceremoniously left the room, stifling her own laughter in Dot's silky coat when she reached the hall.

Tom rose and strode quickly to the other side of the table.

"Helen! what does this mean?" he demanded, standing impatiently before her.

“A WORD FITLY SPOKEN”

She looked up, tears trembling on the long lashes, lips quivering with suppressed laughter.

“Oh, Tom! Isn’t she positively the worst ever? —” she broke off and hid her face in her work, laughing.

“Mrs. Hollingshead? I’ll bless her to the end of my days if she has only spoken the truth!” Tom exclaimed, pulling the work from her unresisting hands and throwing it on the table: “Helen, tell me; is it true? Are you not my father’s daughter?”

“Only by adoption—but Tom, he has been so good to me it seems like denying him——”

“Then you and I are in no way related?” he demanded again, with breathless eagerness, not heeding any side issues.

“In no way, Tom.”

Then, as he gazed at her, seemingly speechless, scarcely able to grasp the truth so suddenly thrust upon him, she asked softly:

“Why, Tom? Are you tired of being my brother?”

What followed would have sounded incoherent to an outsider, but Love’s language, however broken, is always intelligible to lovers.

Words gave place to silence, more eloquent, pregnant with tender meanings. It was Tom who at length broke the silence, as he asked, wonderingly, half reproachfully:

“Why did you not tell me this at first, Helen? You must have known that I loved you.”

“Partly, to please father,” she said,—she glanced slyly at him—“I would seem so much ‘nearer’ to you if you considered me your sister!”

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Tom smiled faintly : “ As though he ever could be a competent judge in such matters ! ”

“ And then,” Helen continued hesitatingly, “ I wasn’t quite *sure*, you know, and I rather wanted to see whether you would be a success as a brother ; but —you were a decided failure,” she added, with laughing emphasis.

“ You might have known beforehand that I would be, without putting me to the test ; ” he replied, half indignantly ; then drawing her to him with a sort of fierce tenderness, he added gravely :

“ You will have to be very good to me, Helen, to make amends for withholding this blessed truth so long. You don’t know what I’ve suffered.”

“ I’m sorry, dear ; I’ll try,” was the penitent, though slightly ambiguous reply.

XXV

THE "MACHINE"

DENNING spoke the truth that night when he said nothing could stop the political "machine." He had manipulated its levers so long that none could gauge its strength or measure the speed of its revolutions more surely than he, and none knew better than he that soon, by the force of its own momentum, it must bring destruction to one side or the other. But he did not know that on that night, a new force was set in motion within the complicated mechanism,—the "wheels within the wheels"—which was to single him out as the object of its pitiless power.

On that stormy night, Wright, the chairman of the Democratic State committee, made a brief visit to Rockland and a private meeting was held in his room at the hotel, at which were present, Layton, the new manager of the *Bulletin*, Todd, manager of the *Independent*, and Meyers, its editor, the last named entering the hotel by a rear entrance and gliding stealthily up back stairways and along the corridors like a sneak-thief.

But little was said at this meeting; those present had come together by pre-arrangement and each knew the business upon which he had come. Meyers, on entering the room, surreptitiously passed something to Todd who was seated near the door, and a few moments

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later, Todd and Wright had exchanged two sealed packages. The latter proceeded, in a business-like way, to open the package in his hands, Layton hanging over his shoulders with feverish excitement. A number of typewritten documents were brought to view, which Wright sorted, giving two or three to Layton, and both concentrated their attention on their contents. Meanwhile, Todd had broken the seals of his package, taking therefrom a pile of crisp bank notes which he counted and proceeded to divide with Meyers. The latter seemed at first unwilling to take the money in the presence of the others; then changing his mind, pocketed it hastily.

The faces of the other two were a study. Layton's features were twitching with excitement, but Wright preserved a tolerably impassive face till near the end of the final paper, when he gave a low whistle and gazed at Layton in astonishment.

"I tell you, boys, you've got a 'scoop' there," Todd exclaimed, "there'll be 'a hot time in town' the night that's published."

"It's all right," said the committee man laconically. "Everything is satisfactory to you and Mr. Meyers, I trust."

"Perfectly satisfactory, sir, and much obliged," Todd replied cheerfully, while Meyers blinked and remained silent.

"Understand now," Wright continued, "we have the exclusive rights to this, to use when and as we please, and we don't want any 'butting in' on this business by the *Independent*."

"Of course; we'll give you a clear field. You've

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paid for it and it's yours," Todd responded, to which Meyers added, with a malicious smile :

"We have no interest in the matter, Mr. Wright. We are politically neutral and personally friendly to Mr. Denning. Mr. Layton, on the contrary, is known to have a grievance, so his part in this is only to be expected."

"God help Denning, if all his 'personal friends' are of your stamp!" Layton retorted, with undisguised contempt.

Todd and Wright joined in a laugh at Meyers' expense and the latter left the room.

"How soon does this come off, Wright?" Todd asked, preparing to follow his coadjutor.

"Can't say definitely," the other returned shortly. "We can afford to 'lay low' for a few days now."

"You bet you can, and a slow fuse is sometimes best. Good night, gentlemen."

"Damn that little yellow dog!" Layton exclaimed when they were alone.

"Who? Meyers? What can you expect of him? It's the nature of the beast. We've got our work to do and we mustn't be too particular about the tools we do it with," Wright answered coolly, again going over the papers in his hands.

"His talk about my having a 'grievance' makes me tired when this business is his own spite-work. Did you see the cur refuse his share of the money when Todd offered it to him? Trying to keep up an appearance before us of having no hand in this, when others besides ourselves are paying him for the same job!"

"What do you mean?" Wright asked, startled.

"Hughes told me to-day that he had promised

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Meyers a secretaryship when he goes to Washington, if he would make sure of Denning's defeat."

"Does Hughes know anything of this?" pointing to the papers in his hands.

"Nothing whatever."

Wright looked relieved. "If Meyers' secretaryship depends on Hughes' going to Washington, he'll need a telescope to find it," he retorted grimly. "With Denning disposed of, we'll have things pretty much our own way."

"Well, I guess this 'disposes' of him pretty effectually," Layton remarked.

"By Jingo! Layton, it's a regular bomb! It will blow him sky-high."

Between themselves they speedily arranged the details of this future "development," and before midnight Wright was on his return to the capital city, without more than a half dozen persons being aware that the chairman of the State committee had visited Rockland.

Wright's boast that his party could afford to 'lay low' was soon realized. It lacked less than ten days of election when Denning and his lieutenants, keeping a constant look-out over the battle field, noted a sudden cessation of hostilities on the part of the enemy. The heavy firing ceased altogether, the fusilade dwindling to a few stray shots sent out, apparently, at random, aimless and harmless.

Perhaps in no way was the mental change in Denning more strikingly evidenced than by his blind acceptance of this temporary lull as a favorable indication. While his most intimate friends and advisers viewed it with distrust, if not with alarm, he became optimistic, even jubilant.

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"Why, man alive, I tell you we've spiked their guns at last," he said to Hollingshead, in reply to some cautionary counsel of his; "they're worsted and they know it."

"Don't you fool yourself, Mac," the other replied, with old-time bluntness. "If they thought they were worsted, they'd be fighting like desperate men. You know how that is yourself. It looks to me as though they were only waiting to spring something on us."

The unnatural light in Denning's eyes died and the piteous, haunted look returned. Hollingshead knew too well what it betokened.

"Above all things, Mac," he pleaded, "keep your head level and your brain clear now. We're liable to be taken by surprise any minute and we want our wits about us."

That evening, as Hollingshead was leaving one of the clubs, he lingered for a moment on the steps above the pavement, uncertain how he should pass the time for the next hour or so. It was a dark night and he stood at a little distance from the entrance, near a small recess in the façade of the building and in the additional shadow of a large column. The moderate step of a heavy man, walking at a leisurely gait, approached from one direction and the quick, nervous step of a small man came rapidly from the opposite direction. Hollingshead could distinguish the outlines of their forms as they met.

"Hullo, Meyers!" drawled the larger man, stopping.

"Why hullo, Davis! Is that you?" was the quick response.

"It appears to be. What's the news?"

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"Nothing doing," the other replied significantly.

"Tell me something I don't know," said the drawling voice, laughing.

"Give me something easy," the other laughed in return; then added, "Putting up any money on the election, Joe?"

"I? Not much! Too damned close for me!"

"Joe, what would you give for a tip?"

"Straight?"

"*Straight.*"

There was a moment's silence, during which Hollingshead withdrew more closely into the niche behind the column.

"Fifteen per cent. of the winnings," came tentatively at length.

"You can afford to do better than that, Joe."

"Huh! You must have a 'sure thing' then!"

"I have, but nobody knows it as yet."

"Well, trot her out, Meyers, and let's see what she looks like. If she steps off well, I'll agree to twenty-five per cent."

"Don't talk loud," said Meyers, lowering his own voice till Hollingshead had to strain every nerve to listen. "Put every dollar you can scrape together, Joe, on Knox."

"Knox! Well, that *knocks* the breath out of a fellow, damned if it don't! Why, Denning's got as good a show as Knox, any day, if not better."

"Denning's goose is cooked."

"Cooked, eh? You don't say! Well, by Jinks, then you must have had a hand in cooking it!"

"I've nothing more to say, Joe, only this: Watch out for the *Bulletin*."

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"The *Bulletin*! What's the matter with the *Independent*?"

"Never mind. What's the use in doing a piece of work yourself when another fellow will pay you to take it off your hands? There's a crowd coming, we'd better separate, so good night. Take my advice, Joe."

"Oh, I'll take it. I'll stake every dollar I can beg, borrow or steal."

Then, as the quick, nervous footsteps hurried away, the larger man turned slowly and moved off in the opposite direction, muttering audibly:

"Well, I'm blowed, damned if I ain't!"

Hollingshead emerged from his hiding place and hastened down the street. The name of Meyers and the voice had recalled to him Denning's secretary during his term of mayor, and with the recollection there had flashed before him that scene in the mayor's office, years before, giving him, as he believed, the key to the present situation. The conviction was borne in upon his mind that what Richards had told that day was the foundation upon which the enemy was preparing its *coup d'état*.

He arrived breathless at Denning's office, only to be reminded that Denning had gone to a political meeting in an adjoining town and would not return until midnight. A number of Denning's political associates had congregated in the outer office, as the town to which he had gone to deliver an address was regarded as one of the strategic points, and reports of the meeting were coming in from Denning's secretary who had accompanied him.

In Denning's private office, Hollingshead found his confidential clerk and a young stranger.

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"Anything wrong, Mr. Hollingshead?" the clerk inquired, startled by Hollingshead's worried appearance.

The latter glanced cautiously at the stranger.

"Oh, haven't you met Mr. Bingham, Mr. Hollingshead? Pardon me. Mr. Bingham is chairman of the Cass County committee and one of Mr. Denning's most trusted lieutenants."

"Perhaps you fellows can help me out," said Hollingshead as he and Bingham shook hands. "It's as I thought, Brown; those chaps have got something up their sleeves and unless we can get in our work on short notice, the deuce and all will be to pay;" and he repeated what he had overheard.

"Great Scott! How are we to get our work in, so long as we don't know what they're up to?" the clerk questioned in dismay.

"Have you any idea what their game is, Mr. Hollingshead?" Bingham asked eagerly.

"Yes, I've more than half an idea, but I'd give a hundred dollars to make sure; for if it's what I suspect, there's just one move to make—and make it damned quick, too—to try and checkmate them; but it's a move we don't want to make unless we're obliged to."

"I see," Bingham replied emphatically. "Where is this *Bulletin* office?" he asked a moment later.

Brown gave the desired information, and the young man turned quickly to Hollingshead:

"Mr. Hollingshead, let me go out and nose around for a while. I'm a stranger here,—so nobody will be 'on' to me—I know a newspaper office from the 'devil' up and I've occasionally done a bit of detective work. If there are any 'straws' blowing about, I'll find how

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the wind is and report to you here in the course of an hour or so," and before the other could reply, he was off on his self-appointed mission.

"I guess that's your man, all right," Brown remarked as the door closed behind him. "He's a bright young fellow and he's done mighty good work for Denning out there in his county. He'll catch on, if anybody can."

An hour later Bingham returned, and at a sign from Hollingshead, followed the latter into the private office. The look in his eyes as he faced Hollingshead alone, told the latter that his surmise regarding the enemy's work had proved correct.

"Mr. Hollingshead, do you know—is it possible——" he stammered, "that they will try to bring a—criminal charge against Mr. Denning?"

"It is possible," said Hollingshead calmly; then noting the consternation in the other's face, he added: "Tell me just what you have learned."

"There isn't much to tell. I went down to the *Bulletin* offices and they have a lot of new presses, you know, in operation in the windows."

Hollingshead nodded.

"There was a crowd outside watching them and I got in the crowd. By and by two or three fellows went inside. I slipped in with them and got into the compositors' room where I walked round a bit without attracting much attention, and when anyone did speak to me, I gave him a song and dance about having come in from the country for a job. But I didn't get 'on' to anything till I saw an old fellow working by himself, apart from the rest and, after awhile, I stumbled up against him and asked him some question. He told

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me to 'get to hell out of there' and I 'got,' but not before I'd seen a form, made up, lying beside him, partly covered. I only saw a part of two head lines, but this was what I read :"

He handed Hollingshead a bit of paper on which he had written as follows :

— — —unearthed at last ! !

— — —didate for Governor a Bigamist ! ! !

"As I thought!" Hollingshead groaned, crushing the bit of paper in his hand as though he were trying to crush the report itself; then smoothing it out and reading it again.

"Good God! Is that what you suspected?" Bingham exclaimed. "But you don't mean to say there's any truth in it?" he added incredulously, noting the anxiety depicted on the other's countenance.

"There's just enough truth in it that we can't deny it *in toto*," Hollingshead answered bitterly. "The worst calumnies are those with a foundation of truth. There is an explanation, but newspaper-scandal-mongers don't wait for explanations, or want them."

As he spoke, he pushed a button beside Denning's desk.

"Brown," he said, as the clerk appeared, "find out to a certainty how soon Mr. Denning will be here."

"Patton just 'phoned over, Mr. Hollingshead, that they wouldn't be back till morning, about four o'clock, he said."

"Four o'clock!" Hollingshead exclaimed, "What does he mean? Have they gone mad over there?"

"He said there was going to be a banquet at midnight, and they wanted Mr. Denning to stay over for another speech."

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"Call him up and let *me* talk to him," said Hollingshead angrily. "I'll tell him there's something besides speeches and banquets on the program to-night."

"But I can't call him up, Mr. Hollingshead," Brown protested. "Patton said they were just leaving the building, last thing before he rang off, and that was fifteen minutes since. I wouldn't know where to find him now."

Hollingshead turned on his heel with something between an oath and a groan; he knew only too well the condition in which Denning would, in all probability, return at four o'clock.

Brown seemed about to make some inquiries, but after a second glance at Hollingshead, withdrew silently.

"Mr. Hollingshead, is there anything I can do?" Bingham inquired. "You said a while ago, you know, there was one move to make to checkmate them; I'll be only too glad to help out if I can."

"You've done us good service already, Mr. Bingham, and here's a little evidence of our appreciation of it—take it, I insist upon it"—as Bingham at first refused the roll of bills the other thrust into his hand—"I said I'd pay that much for a clue and I meant it. You did your part well; it was a clever bit of work and might save the day for us if Denning were only on hand. But say nothing of it at present; I won't even attempt an explanation to-night."

"I understand. There's nothing can be done then, till Mr. Denning's return?"

"Nothing. It's up to Denning himself now."

In the outer office Brown was seated alone, the

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loungers having taken their departure on learning that Denning would not return till morning. He glanced up inquiringly as Bingham passed through the room.

"Mr. Hollingshead seems rather excited," he remarked tentatively.

"Yes. Who is he, Brown? I don't recall having heard his name, but he seems closely associated with Denning."

"You've never heard of him, for he's not in politics, and never will be, but he is Denning's intimate friend, and the only one, at that; known him from boyhood, I believe. He's not easily stirred up, you must have learned something unpleasant;" the gray-haired confidential clerk regarded the younger man searchingly.

"It seems so," the latter replied quietly; then in answer to the questioning look, he added: "It's nothing that I understand myself, and I'm not at liberty to say anything, if I did. I only gleaned a word or two; they seemed significant to Mr. Hollingshead, however, but he gave no explanation. I think it something of a personal nature, rather than political."

"There's precious few of 'em but have got a vulnerable spot in their armor somewhere, and the enemy generally finds it," Brown replied, with a shrewd smile.

"That's about right, I guess. Good night."

Hollingshead did not leave immediately, though Brown was waiting for him to do so. Instead, he walked up and down the private office, occasionally relieving his mind by sundry emphatic expletives and ejaculations.

"Denning's an ass!" he soliloquized at last. "He can't be trusted any longer to manage for himself, and by Jove! I may as well take things into my own

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hands! It's the only possible show to pull him through, and if it fails, it can't make things any worse, for they're as bad as they can be."

So saying, he seated himself at Denning's desk, rang for Brown, ordered him to call a messenger, wrote a note to his wife and had it ready as a heavy-eyed, wan-faced messenger boy entered the room. As he handed him the note, he spun a shining five dollar gold piece on the desk in front of him.

"Boy, do you see that?" he said. "Bring me an answer within thirty minutes and it's yours. Now, step lively for once in your life!"

The dull eyes lighted with a strange gleam and the boy tore out of the office at such a rate, that Brown, still patiently waiting outside, started from his chair as though it had been an electric battery.

The next half hour Hollingshead devoted to the writing of a telegram; rewriting it so many times—tearing up one blank after another as soon as he had filled it out—that by the time he had accomplished the task in a manner satisfactory to himself, the messenger arrived, breathless and eagerly expectant.

Hollingshead paid the boy the gold piece, burned his abortive telegrams in the fireplace, and putting on his topcoat and hat, sallied forth, to the evident relief of Brown.

Instead of returning to the Denning mansion, however, he went to the railway station, where he took the first train for an obscure town some miles distant, and at which he remained till towards morning, returning to Rockland on the same train which brought Denning and his political friends, but without their knowledge of the fact.

XXVI

A DESPERATE CHANCE

THE following morning Denning was, as usual, absent from the breakfast table. Hollingshead was there, but his appearance was not calculated to inspire cheerfulness. Haggard from loss of sleep,—with him an infrequent occurrence—moody and silent, he scarcely tasted his breakfast as he sat mentally reviewing his action of the preceding night and anticipating the coming interview with Denning.

Tom and Helen, noting his gloomy abstraction, exchanged troubled glances and became themselves silent in turn. Mrs. Hollingshead, after two or three efforts to sustain conversation, abandoned the attempt as hopeless. Even Dot seemed to find the atmosphere oppressive, as, with uplifted, inquisitive nose, she scanned the faces about her in evident perplexity.

Comment or question was not to be thought of, however, in the presence of servants and before the meal was over, Hollingshead excused himself and left the room. His wife gave no information beyond the fact that he was out of town all night on business for Mr. Denning. If she knew aught regarding the nature of that business, she did not divulge it.

When Denning, two hours later, entered his sitting room, he found Hollingshead awaiting him. He

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was in remarkably good spirits, but at the sight of the other's face, the cheerful greeting on his lips died.

"What's the matter, Dick? Any bad news?" he asked, with sudden apprehension, "I've only glanced at the paper this morning——"

"There's nothing in the papers yet," Hollingshead interposed grimly, "and I only hope to God there won't be till you've had time to extricate yourself."

Denning turned pale as though with a prescience of what was coming.

"What is it, Dick? It must be something serious."

"It's damned serious, Mac, old man," said Hollingshead, with more feeling than he had shown; "The situation is a desperate one, but you've got one fighting chance left and I want you to pull yourself together and make the most of it."

Hollingshead had touched the right chord.

"If it's fighting they want, I'll give them enough of it," Denning answered; "I'll show them I've only been playing with them until now."

"Mac," said Hollingshead, coming nearer, "it's a deep game they're playing. They've got you pretty nearly check-mated, but there was just one move to make, and as you were not here last night, I took things in my own hands and made that move myself."

"Well, what have you done?" Denning asked with a sort of desperate calmness as the other paused

"I have telegraphed for your wife, Mac."

"For my wife? You have telegraphed for Mrs. Denning?" he repeated, the truth slowly dawning

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upon him, "Good God, Hollingshead! has it come to that? Is *that* their game?"

"That's the game, Mac. I got on to it last night with the help of your man, Bingham. The whole thing is coming out in the *Bulletin* in a day or two——"

"The *Bulletin*—Layton? What does he know?" Denning interposed, a shade more hopefully.

"We havn't time for details, Mac, but Meyers is at the bottom of this. He was with us and heard Richards' story that day—you remember?—and he has simply put two and two together and given the results into Layton's hands."

Denning sank with a muttered curse into the chair before his desk and leaned his head on his hands.

"Don't you see, Mac, there's no time to waste?" Hollingshead continued earnestly. "The only thing to do is to meet your wife and have the ceremony performed, if possible, before the report comes out; then you will be in a position to fight back. That was why I telegraphed last night; there was no time to lose and——"

"And you think you could send a message of that kind without the whole thing becoming public before she could reach here?" Denning demanded, lifting his head and gazing at Hollingshead with eyes that seemed ablaze.

"Mac,"—the other laid a hand on his shoulder as he spoke—"I went to Olney to send that telegram. The place has scarcely a hundred inhabitants and they were all abed and asleep, the operator himself was only half awake. I wired your wife that an urgent business proposition demanded her immediate, personal attention, and that you would meet her and

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explain, and I stayed there until I got a wire that she would start by the first train."

"I tell you, Dick, she'll raise the very devil when she gets here," Denning groaned, rising, and striding up and down the room like a caged beast.

"And I tell you," Hollingshead retorted, losing patience, "you'll have the very devil to face in a day or two as it is, and you had better get ready for it."

He planted himself directly in front of Denning.

"Listen to me, Mac! There's no need of your wife coming here at all; it is only necessary that she be within the State. Take my advice. Get away as quickly and quietly as you can in your private car. If any one knows of your going, it will be supposed you are on political business. By to-morrow morning you can meet her near the State boundary, sidetrack at a certain small town I can tell you of, have the ceremony performed in your car, and she can then return to B. C. and you to Rockland without any one being the wiser."

"How about a license?" Denning demanded.

"I'll fix that. I'll give you a letter to an old fellow I know, in the town I spoke of, who will get whatever is needed and be as silent as the grave. He'll do anything for me, or any friend of mine."

Denning resumed his pacing up and down, but more moderately.

"You have laid your plans well," he said at last, "if my wife doesn't overthrow the whole thing. Dick,"—he wheeled suddenly—"they've got me cornered—I'll admit it—but I'd fight the whole gang, single-handed and alone, and win out, but for that woman."

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“You may win out yet, Mac ; but this is your only chance.”

“Yes, it’s my only chance—and a desperate one—but I’ll make the most of it. I’ll bring that woman to terms if I can ; if not—I’ll defy her to do her worst.”

They spent an hour or so in the arrangement of details.

“Above all things, Mac,” said Hollingshead, when their plans were completed, “keep your head clear ; you can’t afford to lose your grip on things for a moment.”

“No danger of that with something definite to fight,” Denning retorted. “That’s only when the blue-devils get me, when I have to fight shadows and phantoms. I’m up against the real thing, now.”

The next few hours were filled with preparations for as quiet a departure as possible. Denning’s private car, on some slight pretext, was sent to the repair shops, at some distance from the station, from whence it was to be attached to the first west-bound train leaving Rockland after night-fall. Denning and Hollingshead agreed upon cipher telegrams which the former was to send, to indicate the success of his undertaking, or the reverse.

When all was completed, there remained an hour—long with suspense—until the usual time for the publication of the *Bulletin*. Would that day’s issue contain the fateful news, or would there be yet another day of grace ?

The preceding hours had been crowded with intense thought and rapid action, in preparing a definite defense against a definite and expected attack, so that Denning had felt comparatively little need for

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stimulants. But now, as the moments dragged slowly by he was conscious of the reaction swiftly setting in, and fearful lest his agitation might betray itself and him, he retired to his private office on the plea of important business and locked the door against intrusion.

Here Hollingshead found him, as, with the first obtainable copy of the *Bulletin* in his pocket and joy in his heart, he entered the room with the key Denning had given him. As it clicked in the lock, the latter paused in his restless stride up and down the floor, turning a white, strained face to the door.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed involuntarily, a moment later; "I know by your face, Dick, the hounds are not set loose on me yet."

"Not so much as a bark from them to-night, Mac," the other responded joyfully, "and to-morrow by this time, you will be ready for them."

"I'm not so sure of that," Denning replied, dropping wearily into a chair and wiping the perspiration from his forehead. Hollingshead could not help observing how his hands trembled. "I'm not so hopeful as you, Dick, for I know with whom I have to deal. I would rather face the devil himself than that woman, when she knows the truth. It will be *hell*," he added with terrible emphasis, while his hands clenched with a sudden, spasmodic movement.

"Brace up, old man," said Hollingshead cheerfully. "You've had a hard day and it's getting on your nerves, that's all. Let's go home now; things will look brighter after dinner and you need to rest up a bit before you start."

Silently Denning rose and began preparations for

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leaving. Hollingshead, watching him, was conscious of some new power controlling him. He had been more like his former self that day ; dominant, master of himself, and, to a certain extent, of the situation. While he was wondering what this new stimulus or incentive might be, Denning closed his desk and turned, facing him.

“This has been my ‘busy day,’” he remarked, with something of his old satirical smile, “but I have found time to attend to one or two personal matters. The State committees will, of course, drop most of these party papers after election, and I’ve given orders for certain machinery to be set in motion within the next few days, that will drive the *Bulletin* to the wall. I also happened to know of a couple of mortgages hanging over Meyers’ head ; I’ve bought them up and put them in my attorney’s hands, and by the time they get through with him, he’ll be squeezed drier than a lemon. There’s a certain satisfaction in knowing the fate of some other people, even if I don’t know my own,” he concluded with a sort of bitter irony, as he and Hollingshead passed out of the room.

Soon after dark, Denning was driven in a closed carriage to the repair shops, where his car awaited him on a sidetrack, nearly a mile from the city.

Hollingshead accompanied him and went on board the car for a few moments.

“I would like to go along with you, old man, if I thought I could do any good,” he said as they shook hands.

“I know, Dick ; but this is one of the cases that a man has got to tackle alone. I will feel better

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knowing you are here on the ground, and your wife will be company for Helen——”

“That reminds me, Mac ; I think it would be better for my wife to go home to-morrow and take Helen with her. It’s likely to be rather nasty, don’t you know, and better have the women folks out of the way till it blows over.”

“Do as you think best, Dick. I’ll miss the little girl, though ; but” he added gloomily, “I doubt if her mother will consent to her remaining here after this.”

“I think,” said Hollingshead, dryly, “there’s some one whose words will have more weight with her just at present than her mother’s ;” but Denning, oblivious to everything outside his own troubles, neither heeded nor heard.

The night was unusually dark, and as the west-bound train, after a brief stop some distance from the station, passed out of the city limits, no one outside the trainmen knew that bringing up the rear of the long line of coaches was a private car with a solitary occupant.

XXVII

MAN PROPOSES BUT WOMAN DISPOSES

WHEN Hollingshead awoke the next morning to a review of the events of the preceding thirty-six hours, he congratulated himself. He thoroughly believed that he had piloted Denning past the shoals and that, though he might yet encounter high winds and a choppy sea, he would make port safely. He had yet to learn that man's best laid plans "gang aft agley" where a woman is concerned in them.

The first hitch in his carefully arranged program was Helen's refusal to leave Rockland, even when informed of the storm then gathering; so the project of his wife's return home was abandoned.

When he spoke to Tom of what that day was likely to bring forth, the latter manifested little surprise.

"It is about what I have been expecting," he replied quietly, "and I thought from father's appearance yesterday there was some desperate game on hand. He had the look of a man staking his last card."

"He is staking his last card," Hollingshead admitted. "His only hope is to get everything legalized first, if possible, and then make the best fight he can. It's a deucedly slim chance he's got, but it is a chance and he may win out."

"The chance, Mr. Hollingshead, lies with Mrs. Denning and it's a slimmer one than you think," said the

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younger man deliberately. "He can make terms with the people—for he's a popular man and a powerful one, notwithstanding his failings—but I doubt if he can make terms with that woman."

"But, by Jove, Tom, the woman must have some reason!"

Tom's only answer was an expressive shrug.

"Will she return with him?" he asked suddenly, after a pause.

"I should say not!" Hollingshead retorted. "I should think she would want to keep jolly well out of it."

"If she doesn't," Tom added thoughtfully, "Helen must not remain here—at least, under present circumstances."

"I've tried to get her to go home with my wife for a few days, but she won't hear to it; she won't leave her father."

Tom made no reply and they went their devious ways.

The forenoon dragged heavily for all concerned. To Tom, performing his duties as cashier almost mechanically, his every sense alert for indications of the impending blow, it seemed that morning as though occasionally, among the faces crowding about the window, he caught a curious glance, a peculiar smile; but it might have been, he reflected, a trick of his own imagination.

In Denning's private office, Hollingshead awaited the message of success which he so confidently expected; but hour after hour passed and no word came, either of success or failure.

But it was upon Helen that the burden of those long hours fell the heaviest, for she, better than any one

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else, realized what was to come. But she bore her burden stoically, saying little or nothing of her worst fears, and it was with brave, smiling eyes that formed a piteous contrast to the pale, tense face, that she welcomed Tom at midday.

"No word from father yet," she said, in answer to his eager inquiries. "Uncle Dick has just 'phoned that he will not be up for lunch. He is still hoping against hope," she added, her smile growing rather pathetic, "he told me to remember that 'no news is good news.'"

"Not in this case I fear," Tom replied, but Mrs. Hollingshead's entrance at that moment prevented his speaking of the subject which had been uppermost in his thoughts since his last words with Hollingshead that morning.

They were just rising from lunch when a cab was seen coming rapidly up the driveway towards the house, and while they were speculating as to this probable messenger for Denning, Hollingshead himself alighted before the cab had fairly stopped and ran quickly up the steps, while it waited. His wife was the first to meet him as he entered the reception hall.

"Beth, I'm dumfounded!" he exclaimed, "No word from Mac,—no, nothing yet from your father"—to Tom and Helen—"but I just heard something that knocked me out and I couldn't stop to 'phone for the carriage; I took the first cab. I stepped in to Hegan's, Tom, to get a quick lunch, and as I was going in, met Trafford, who asked where Denning was. I told him he was out of town for a bit but would be back in a few hours, and then he inquired what it meant that Mrs. Denning was coming back. I nearly fell over myself.

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‘Mrs. Denning!’ said I, ‘the last I knew she was in B. C. and talking of staying there over the holidays.’ He replied that that was what he and his wife had understood, but that his wife had just received a telegram from her, less than an hour before, that she was on her way to Rockland and wanted to come direct to their home for a day or two, and she requested that their carriage meet her at the four-thirty train. Well, I was bowled over and I guess he jolly well saw it, but I got out of it the best I could and up here as quick as I could. Now, what in the deuce does it all mean?’

For a moment, no one spoke. The news had come like a blow. Even Helen was unprepared for such a move as this on her mother’s part. She was the first to speak, however.

‘It means, Uncle Dick,’ she said slowly but steadily, ‘that this is turning out just as father feared; that everything is at an end between him and my mother.’

‘But,’ Hollingshead insisted, ‘she *must* marry him, and why can’t she do it quietly, you know? What’s the use of coming back here to try deliberately to ruin him; or if she must come here, why does she go to Trafford’s instead of coming here? If she objects to our being here——’

‘It isn’t that, at all, Uncle Dick,’ Helen protested quickly. ‘Mrs. Trafford is mamma’s most intimate friend, and, of course, this would be a terrible shock to her, and——’

‘That is right, Dick,’ Mrs. Hollingshead interposed; ‘In your friendship for Mr. Denning you must not forget his wife’s feelings in this matter. Just fancy, as Helen says, the shock to her!’

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"I know, Beth, I know ; it's an awful mess all round, awful?" Hollingshead groaned, wheeling excitedly about and darting aimlessly here and there in his perplexity, much like a bewildered bumblebee ; "But, deuce take it all ! why can't she be reasonable at a time like this, when Mac's hopes are hanging in the balance?" Then catching sight of the waiting cab, he exclaimed ; "I must get back to the office ; word may come from Mac any minute and Heaven only knows what it will be !"

"Look out for this evening's *Bulletin*, if the report of Mrs. Denning's return gets out," Tom said in a low tone, as Hollingshead passed him. The latter gazed at him in blank consternation.

"Jove ! you're right, I hadn't thought of that. They'll set the dogs on now, and no knowing if Mac is dead or alive ; I'm worried about your father, Tom."

Mrs. Hollingshead accompanied her husband into the hall. Tom crossed the room quickly to where Helen was standing. He spoke her name tenderly and as she turned toward him, he was suddenly impressed by the sweet womanliness of her manner and bearing, so that he felt a strange hesitancy in speaking the words which were trembling on his lips.

"Helen, dearest, there is a terrible crisis coming ;" he paused an instant.

"I know, Tom ; but you need have no fear for me," she replied, reading the apprehension in his face.

"Perhaps I realize what it will mean to you better than you do. For that reason, and because I want to save you as much as possible, I must speak very plainly."

She looked wonderingly into his face.

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"I know your love and loyalty to my father well enough to know where your sympathy will be in this coming estrangement and separation, and that you will be likely to act in accordance with your sympathies, at any sacrifice to yourself."

"I shall not leave father," she said, with quiet determination.

"But your mother will insist upon it, and—she will be in the right."

She looked at him in quick surprise.

"Remember, dear," he continued, "when the truth is known, as it must be soon, my father and I will no longer be regarded as your father and brother."

She hid her face in her hands with a low cry as a comprehension of his meaning suddenly flashed upon her.

He silently drew her to him, caressing her with light, soothing touch for a moment; then seizing her hands, he raised her head till he looked into her eyes.

"Tom," she cried pleadingly, "is there no way that I can stay in my own home, with those who are dearest to me?"

"Only one way, sweetheart."

"And that is—what?"

"As my wife."

Her eyes fell, and it was Tom himself this time who hid her face—against his breast.

For a few minutes he stroked her hair in silence; then bending over her, he whispered:

"It is only for your sake, love,—for your safety and protection—that I ask this. I know the strain, the tension under which you are living, and I will not add to it one iota. I will ask for no fulfilment of the bond

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between us—I will not ask you to come to me—until you are ready of your own accord. We will be simply lovers, as we are now, only—since you will then have no right to my father's name—you shall bear mine. Do you consent?"

"Yes, Tom," she replied, but without lifting her head.

"If necessary, will you marry me within the next few hours?"

"Whenever you think best."

"Thank you, Helen, for trusting me. I promise you I will never give you cause to regret this."

One little hand crept about his neck: "I thank *you*, Tom; some day you will know how much!"

He held her closely for a moment; then releasing her gently, he kissed her, but without a glance into the downcast face, and left the room.

The news of the telegram received from Mrs. Denning flashed through the town like wild-fire. Within two hours of its receipt the Trafford house was besieged by reporters, reminding one, in their rabid eagerness for details, of a pack of wolves on the scent of their prey. As Tom had predicted, the *Bulletin* sprang to action. Fearing that its treasured "scoop" might be anticipated by some of its contemporaries, it issued an extra edition two hours in advance of its usual time of publication. In consequence, just as the doors of the North Western were closing on the stroke of three, Tom Denning, with every sense on the alert, suddenly caught a newsboy's shrill cry—

"Extry edition of the *Bulletin*! All about the Denning scandal!"

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Hollingshead, pacing the floor in Denning's private office in a state of mind bordering on frenzy,—for no word had come from Denning—heard the same cry. Almost simultaneously, the door opened and Brown, with a white, scared face, handed him a telegram and a *Bulletin* and discreetly withdrew. In his frantic haste to read the former, Hollingshead tossed the newspaper aside, but even then, before his too eager fingers could tear open the yellow envelope, his eyes met the fateful headlines staring at him from the desk,—

A DARK SECRET UNEARTHED AT LAST!!

THE REFORM PARTY'S CANDIDATE FOR GOVERNOR A BIGAMIST!!!

With a groan, he turned to the "key" and translated the cipher dispatch in his hands. It read as follows :

Everything fallen through. Will fight to the bitter end. Arrive on four-thirty train. Meet me as arranged.

MAC.

The telegram fell from his nerveless fingers and fluttered to the floor. Hollingshead's house of cards had fallen about him and he sat, speechless and motionless, amid the ruins, in a sort of mental collapse, until roused by voices in the adjoining room, inquiring for Denning.

A realization of the situation swept upon him with overwhelming force. Outside, he could hear the clamorous voices of newsboys in sharp rivalry over the many and eager buyers of their wares. Within, the beginning of that increasing, turbulent tide of questions which he was powerless either to check, or to stem.

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Stricken with sudden panic, he picked up the telegram, jamming that and the *Bulletin* into his pockets, dived into his top-coat and seizing his hat, rang for Brown.

"I have been called away, Brown," he said, as that worthy appeared, "I must leave, but Mr. Denning will be here shortly. Hold the crowd back the best you can till he comes."

"But—Mr. Hollingshead," the man stammered, while through the partially open door behind him a reporter loomed at a little distance.

"Shut that door!" Hollingshead commanded, "Shut and lock it!"

Brown obeyed.

"Brown," said the other, "I know what you want, but I can't say a word. Between you and me, I don't know what to say, and it's better to say nothing than the wrong thing. Denning will be here in less than two hours. Hold them off some way, till he comes."

"But, Mr. Hollingshead," Brown again protested, "shall I deny or admit it? I've got to do one or the other."

"It's all a mistake. Denning will set it right when he comes," Hollingshead shouted in desperation, as he rushed from the room through a private exit.

Avoiding the crowd, he plunged down a dark hallway to the freight elevator, in which he descended and found himself deposited in an alley in the rear of the building. At the first corner he was fortunate enough to find a cab, however, which speedily conveyed him to the Denning mansion.

Tom and the *Bulletin* had preceded him. A glance at the faces turned toward him as he entered the

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library told him they knew all. Mechanically he repeated Denning's message.

"We know it, Dick ; it is all here," said his wife, pointing to the paper.

"The deuce, you say ! Has the *Bulletin* got hold of that?" he exclaimed despairingly.

She nodded, and dropping into the first chair, with a muttered expletive, Hollingshead drew forth **his** copy and began to read.

The report contained, as he anticipated, the main facts related by Richards that day in the mayor's office, with many added details,—evidently gathered by some one familiar with the *locus* of the scene—all amplified, exaggerated and dwelt upon with sickening particularity. It filled nearly three columns and its glaring sensational headlines charged Denning with seduction, wilful desertion of his wife and child and bigamy. At the close was a later report, as follows :

A dispatch just received from one of our special men, sent out to meet the four-thirty train and interview Mrs. Denning, who is on her way home, confirms the above. The lady states that a confession just made to her by Mr. Denning—who, hearing of her intended coming to Rockland, came out to try to effect some sort of compromise and persuade her to return to her friends—substantially corroborates the *Bulletin's* report. Mrs. Denning wishes it distinctly understood, however, that her daughter is in no way affected by this scandal, as the young lady known among us as Miss Helen Denning, is Miss Helen Wynne, a child by a former marriage, in no way related to Mr. Denning, and who has borne his name only as a concession to his wishes.

For the sake of her son, Kingsley, Mrs. Denning says she will consent to a marriage ceremony with the man who has thus publicly outraged and insulted her, but

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that she will immediately thereafter take steps towards a legal separation.

Mr. Denning is returning to Rockland on the same train on which the lady herself is a passenger, but in his private car. Further particulars will be published in the regular edition of the *Bulletin*.

Hollingshead had not finished reading the above, when a number of reporters were seen approaching the house, two of them representatives of papers friendly to Denning, and one, the reverse.

"Good God!" he groaned, "I can't face those fellows. I don't know what Mac expects to do, and I can't go back on him by admitting any of this stuff."

"I will go," Helen exclaimed, springing from her chair.

"You, Helen? No, I'll see them myself," Tom interposed.

"No, Tom; let me," she insisted; "I know father so well and he always trusts me. Besides, what I say will have more weight with them. They would think you were prejudiced, perhaps; that you spoke only for father. I can speak for both."

At the pleading in look and tone, Tom wavered.

"Some gentlemen to see Mr. Denning, Jr., or Mr. Hollingshead," the butler announced, sublimely unconscious of any undue excitement in the air.

"Show them into the reception hall, Johnson," Helen replied, and a moment later she entered the large hall, pale, but perfectly composed.

At sight of her, the three men rose quickly, exchanging glances of consternation. The eldest broke the short, but constrained, silence.

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"We had no intention of troubling you, Miss Denning—pardon—Miss——"

"Miss Denning, if you please," she interposed politely, but with marked emphasis.

"Miss Denning, we hoped to see Mr. Hollingshead, or the younger Mr. Denning. Are they in?"

"They are," she replied calmly; "but as they are comparative strangers to you and have not the personal knowledge of the present situation that I have, I preferred to see you myself."

The men again exchanged glances; they were at a loss how to understand her.

"You have perhaps seen the *Bulletin*, Miss Denning?" ventured the representative of the *Standard*, Denning's paper.

"I have."

"What have you to say regarding this report? We would, of course, like to refute it, if possible," he added.

"It cannot be refuted in its entirety, Mr. Parker," she replied, "but it is a gross misrepresentation from beginning to end."

"Do *you* know the truth regarding this affair?" Parker asked, in a tone of unbounded astonishment.

"I do; and have for some time." Then noting the surprise on all three faces, she continued: "There were circumstances connected with the arrival of my brother—of Mr. Denning, Jr."—she corrected herself with slightly deepening color—"which made it necessary that I should be told the truth. We had met before you know," she added, with a smile.

"Ah, yes; in the railway disaster." Parker immediately scented a romance.

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"My father," she continued, with a lingering emphasis on the words which the reporters noted, "will soon be here and will doubtless speak for himself; but one of you gentlemen represents an evening paper, and for his benefit I will say this much: My father never wronged my mother intentionally. He married her honestly, having been informed that his first wife had died. He has been a good husband to her, and the best of fathers to me, and no amount of misrepresentation can ever turn me against him."

"Do you intend to take sides with him against your mother, Miss Denning?" Parker inquired, surprised.

"I prefer not to answer that question now, Mr. Parker. Time will show."

"Pardon me, Miss Denning," said the eldest of the group, the representative of the opposition party, "if Mr. Denning was innocent in this affair, why did he not, on hearing of his first wife's death, explain the situation to your mother and have their marriage legalized?"

"My father will doubtless explain why," she replied; "But," she added slowly, "in the light of to-day's events, I should consider that question unnecessary. You will please excuse me now, gentlemen; Johnson will attend you to the door. Good afternoon."

"Gad! she's a plucky little one, all right," commented one, as the irreproachable and unconscious Johnson closed the door upon them.

"Gee whiz! if she isn't going to stand by the old man!" exclaimed the youngest of the party.

"There's a 'nigger in the wood-pile' and don't you forget it!" declared Parker.

"What's that?" queried the others.

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“I’ll bet my bottom dollar it’s the young fellow she’s going to ‘stand by,’ lucky dog! Didn’t you notice her allusion to their having met before this little brother and sister comedy act of theirs?”

As a result of the *Bulletin’s* announcement that Denning was returning on the same train as his wife, a large crowd had gathered at the station when the train pulled in. As soon as it came to a stop, hundreds of eager, curious eyes had the satisfaction of seeing Mrs. Denning descend from a Pullman car and enter the Trafford carriage, which then turned and was quickly lost sight of, but beyond that, they were doomed to disappointment. No private car was visible, nor was Denning among the passengers. Meanwhile Denning, in his closed carriage, was being driven swiftly from the repair shops to his home, Hollingshead seated beside him.

The latter had never seen Denning as he appeared then. His face was white and set, with desperation and determination expressed in every line. His frame, as he held himself rigidly erect, loomed up massively in the dim light, towering above Hollingshead; and there was an unusual quality in his voice, that reminded the other of cold steel ringing against adamant.

“You’ve done your best, Hollingshead; I’m not blaming you,” he was saying. “You are accustomed to dealing with women made of flesh and blood, not creatures of stone. I never would have believed that I would humble myself to any human being as I did to-day, to that creature. I offered her every consideration if only she would have the ceremony performed quietly and go back to her friends, but she only insulted me. She told me she would not stoop even to

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marriage with me, except for her son's sake—*her* son, mark you—and that after the ceremony, she never wished to set eyes on me again ; and all in that devilish, impassive, cold-blooded way of hers, without a trace of emotion, not even of anger. Now, I simply defy her to do her worst."

"You know she telegraphed the Traffords to meet her?" Hollingshead inquired.

"I supposed so. She stipulated that the ceremony be performed there, saying she would never set foot in any house of mine."

Denning had seen the *Bulletin*; he spoke of it briefly, then lapsed into silence, one that remained unbroken till he reached home, and even there he had little to say. He seemed like a man absorbed in some fixed, definite purpose, oblivious to his surroundings.

Having dispatched his son and Hollingshead upon important errands, he went at once to his apartments, where he proceeded to dress with his accustomed scrupulous care. The reporters who had flocked to the station to meet him, having ascertained from the trainmen that his car had been sidetracked at the shops, proceeded in a body to the house and were admitted to the reception hall.

In a few moments, Denning descended the broad, winding stairway, in immaculate attire, accompanied by Hollingshead. His appearance was not that of a crushed or doomed man, or even of a man anticipating defeat or failure. Dominant and masterful as ever, the only change noticeable, was his gray, impassive face, which resembled stone, rather than flesh and blood. He greeted them in the same tone which had impressed Hollingshead so strangely.

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“I regret, gentlemen, I can give you no time at present. I am due at Mr. Trafford’s in a few moments, at a ceremony the nature of which you probably know by this time. I would like each one of you to be present, however, and here is my card which will secure your admittance to the house. The lady herself seems to prefer publicity, and I will give her all the publicity possible. Immediately after the ceremony I will meet you in my private office.”

To say that all—Hollingshead included,—were surprised, would be a mild statement, but Denning’s manner precluded question or comment. After events, however, proved this to have been simply one of his strokes of finesse, upon which he prided himself.

When Denning and Hollingshead arrived at the Trafford mansion they found awaiting them, Mr. and Mrs. Trafford, Mrs. Denning and Dr. Guthrie; the last named being the rector of the church which Mrs. Denning attended and to which Denning was a heavy contributor. The reporters were also present, ranged like a row of wall-flowers on one side of the room, looking rather out of place but evidently appreciating the situation and resolved to make the most of it.

Trafford nodded coldly to Denning. The ladies ignored him. Dr. Guthrie greeted him with perfect courtesy, though with less than his accustomed cordiality. After greetings had been exchanged, Dr. Guthrie said :

“I find myself in rather an awkward situation, Mr. Denning. Will you and your friend please be seated while I explain?”

Then seating himself, he continued ; “I have been

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called to perform a marriage ceremony ; to read the office denominated by our Church as that of Holy Matrimony ; a service so solemn and sacred in its nature that our sister Church includes it among her Sacraments. I find in conversation with the lady herself that this ceremony is to be performed simply from a legal point of view, with the sole object of legitimizing the child of an illegal union, and with no intention whatever of any performance of the solemn vows themselves. I may be considered ultra in my views, but to me the marriage vows are fully as sacred and binding as an oath, and to take them in this manner, with no intention of fulfilment, would, in my opinion, be not only sacrilege, but a form of perjury, and I cannot conscientiously be a party to this affair. I have talked with the lady and endeavored to dissuade her from her somewhat extreme position, and I would consider it a favor, Mr. Denning, if you would state what you are prepared to do ; whether, in your opinion, these vows may not be, in a measure at least, performed ? ”

Hollingshead expected a stern negative, but Denning put forth another diplomatic stroke.

“That rests entirely with the lady herself, Dr. Guthrie,” he replied courteously ; “so far as I am concerned, I am willing to do my part toward this fulfilment. And permit me one explanation, Dr. Guthrie. You alluded to an illegal union : I think you will believe me when I say that I entered upon that union with as honorable intention as a man could have, supposing it to be perfectly legal. I had been informed of the demise of my first wife and believed myself absolutely free to remarry, and not

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until years afterward, did I learn anything to the contrary."

"I am very glad to hear this, Mr. Denning," said Dr. Guthrie; "it alters the aspect of the case to a certain extent. May I inquire why, when you found your error, you took no steps to rectify it?"

"Simply because, Dr. Guthrie, knowing the lady's prejudices, I knew any such attempt to be hopeless; that it would only result in the breaking up of my home, with all the notoriety which is the unavoidable concomitant of affairs of that kind. Believing, as I did, that the facts would never become known, and considering my marriage morally valid, because entered into with honorable intent, I thought, of two evils, it were better to choose the less. I may have erred in judgment, Dr. Guthrie, but my intentions have been honest from the first until now."

"I have every confidence in your sincerity, Mr. Denning," Dr. Guthrie replied, "and though, as you say, you erred in judgment, I think the error one which may readily be pardoned and I hope the lady herself will agree with me."

"I have no hope of that kind, Dr. Guthrie," Denning responded quickly, "and that was not my object in making this statement. It was only made that you, and these gentlemen present"—indicating the reporters—"might have a clear understanding of the facts in the case."

Dr. Guthrie turned appealingly to Mrs. Denning: "In view of the statement just made, are you not willing to consider the matter more favorably?"

"My decision has been taken, Dr. Guthrie, and it is unalterable," was the calm reply.

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Dr. Guthrie's face expressed both disappointment and displeasure, and he at once excused himself. It was observed that his manner in taking leave was far less cordial toward the lady in the case than it had been, or than toward Denning himself, and the latter felt that he had scored his first point.

A magistrate was summoned who performed the ceremony as briefly and expeditiously as possible; after which, Denning and the reporters went immediately to his office, while Hollingshead returned to the house.

Reporters are not ubiquitous; hence it came about that in their eagerness to cover all the details of the larger affair, two side issues, either one of which would ordinarily have furnished a good "story," escaped their ken; namely, a quiet wedding which occurred at Denning's home, and a scene a few hours later, at the Trafford home, when the senior Mrs. Denning having sent for her daughter, received a brief visit from the junior Mr. Denning and his wife.

The following morning, as Parker, at a late hour, was glancing through the *Standard* to see how his "copy" on the Denning affair—sent in between three and four o'clock—looked in cold print, the following notices caught his eye:

At the residence of J. Harrison Trafford, by Judge Chapman, the Hon. Thomas Macavoy Denning and Mrs. Marian Kingsley Wynne.

At the home of the bride's parents, by the Rev. Dr. Guthrie, Thomas Macavoy Denning, Jr., and Helen Morton Wynne.

Parker's comments were more forcible than elegant.

XXVIII

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DENNING's offices presented a scene of bustling activity that night. Reporters came and went; messengers rushed hither and thither; telephone and telegraph kept him in constant communication with County and State committees. From all points, his lieutenants responded to his summons, and under the dominant spell of his personality rallied to his support.

Not content to trust entirely to reporters, Denning dictated a personal statement, so infused with his own individuality that those who read it, afterward said it had seemed as though he himself stood before them. This was first typewritten, then mimeographed, and ere daylight, scores of copies were on their way to the various newspapers throughout the State.

Just as day was breaking, Denning, haggard from nearly forty-eight hours' loss of sleep, tired in body and brain, but indomitable as ever in spirit, sought a room in a club house near by for a few hours' rest.

Even then his state of mental excitement did not allow him to sleep long. It was at a comparatively early hour that Hollingshead found him, skimming eagerly through the morning papers, while drinking black coffee and trying to force a little food. There were liquors beside him on the table, but Hollingshead noticed that he took but sparingly of them.

Denning, noting his glance, smiled faintly: "I am

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only taking enough to keep up my nerve force, Dick. I don't need any artificial stimulants now. God knows the stress of this situation is stimulus enough ! My fighting blood is up now, Hollingshead, and I'll win, or else die in the thick of the fight."

Hollingshead turned the subject. "We looked for you at home, this morning, Mac. Helen was jolly well cut up that her daddy wasn't there to give her his blessing, don't you know."

"Helen? Is she there still?" Denning asked, his attention momentarily diverted from himself. "Her mother will not allow her to remain long, though," he added with a sigh.

"You can set your mind at rest on that score, Mac," said the other, laughing. "Helen and her mother had a little farewell scene over there at Trafford's late last night. Must have been rather effective too, from all accounts, but you had a corner on the reporters at that time, so fortunately there's nothing of it in the papers. Her mother sent for her," Hollingshead continued, seeing that Denning was interested ; "Tom went with her, but kept discreetly in the background, till, Helen having made her little declaration of independence, her mother tried to detain her forcibly, when he came forward and asserted his right to take his wife home with him ; that was where the dramatic part came in, you know——"

"His wife? Whose wife?" Denning interposed.

"Thomas Macavoy, Jr's," the other answered proudly. "Didn't you know Tom and Helen were married last night? Why, old man, where are your eyes?" and he pointed out the marriage notices to Denning's astonished gaze.

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"Macavoy and Helen!" the latter exclaimed. "I regarded them as brother and sister. How did this ever come about?"

"It came about right under your eyes, Mac, only you were too absorbed to see it. Yesterday, when affairs took this turn, they decided to hasten things a little. I knew Tom had bought a license and so last night, seeing that Dr. Guthrie seemed disappointed, don't you know, I had a word in private with him as he was leaving, and told him that a carriage would call for him a little later to bring him to your house where there would be a ceremony he needn't have any scruples about performing. But, as I was saying, there was a bit of a dramatic scene when Tom announced himself as Mrs. Denning's son-in-law. She was as cold-blooded as ever, but she made some terribly cutting allusions, as you can imagine, and ended by disowning Helen. She declared that henceforth she had no child except her son, but that no power on earth should ever take him from her."

"No one will ever attempt it," Denning interposed coldly; then, his thought evidently reverting to Helen, he added: "It is just as well. She would have stood by me in any event, and now there will be some one to look after her in case——"

He did not complete the sentence. Instead, he asked, with complete change of manner:

"What day is this, Dick? I've lost track of time the last forty-eight hours. Friday? Gad! election only four days off? Man alive! we mustn't sit here!"

Those four days were strenuous ones; crowded with effort on the part of Denning and his friends to undo the evil wrought by his enemies in that one fatal blow.

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But their work seemed of little avail. A split had already formed in the party and almost every hour brought rumors of fresh defections. The outlook grew dark, and though Denning only spurred his men on with renewed energy, by Saturday night defeat seemed inevitable had not a breeze from an unexpected quarter stirred the current in an opposite direction.

Mrs. Denning had lost no time in instituting proceedings for a legal separation, employing as her attorney, a man whose animosity to her husband was well known, and who at once began a series of attacks upon Denning the very malevolence and falsity of which incited the beginning of a reaction in his favor. In addition, the Sunday papers contained belated accounts of Helen's refusal to desert her foster father, of her marriage—which was surrounded with a glamour of romance—and her mother's consequent anger. Helen was a universal favorite and popular sympathy went out to her and, through her, to her father. Denning's course of action, both at the marriage ceremony and thereafter, was also compared with his wife's, to the detriment of the latter.

By Monday morning it was evident that the tide had turned ; the current of popular favor was slowly but surely returning in Denning's direction. That day he redoubled his efforts, trying to speed this returning wave to the utmost boundary of the State. His efforts were not wholly unavailing. The following morning, the leading papers of his party, in Rockland, in the capital city, and throughout the central portions of the State, were almost without exception reunited in their fealty to him. The outposts, the numerous small towns

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and scattering hamlets in the large, outlying rural districts still remained doubtful.

Contrary to his usual custom, Denning was astir early on the morning of election day. Though nearly exhausted from long hours of incessant labor, anxiety and excitement would not allow him to rest, and for the first time in weeks, he met the family at the breakfast table.

Every nerve in his body seemed aquiver ; at times he felt a sense of suffocation and then, for an instant, his mind would seem a total blank, but he summoned all his will power, and only his trembling hands, the tense lines about his mouth and the almost untasted food betrayed the intense agitation under which he was to live that day.

He spent his time at the table skimming through the papers, his set, rigid face indicating neither pleasure nor the reverse at what he read ; then tossing the last one impatiently aside, he rose and gave orders for the carriage to be brought round as soon as possible, seeming in feverish haste to be gone, and pacing restlessly up and down the library while he waited.

After his first greeting, he had seemed unconscious of the presence of the others, and Hollingshead now said in a low tone, to his wife :

“Mac is pretty near the end of his rope ; I’m afraid he’ll collapse before the day is over.”

Helen excused herself and going to her father in the library, threw her arms about his neck, smiling brightly into the shadowed eyes with their far-away look.

“You must take a kiss, for good luck, you know, daddy dear,” she said, playfully drawing the

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strained, anxious face towards herself and laying her cool cheek against his fevered one.

The tense lines relaxed into a smile, pathetic in its weariness and wistfulness. He drew her to him, stroking her golden hair in the old caressing fashion.

"My little girl stood by me, didn't she?" he said; then queried playfully: "Was it for the old man's sake, Helen, or the young fellow's?"

"For your sake, daddy. I would have stood by you had there been no Tom, and you shall not call yourself an old man."

"I feel old this morning," he replied, with a sigh.

"That is because you are worn out. After to-day, you must take a good long rest. And you must not feel that the home is broken up, father dear," she added earnestly. "I think we will have a very happy home—you and Tom and I—happier than ever before."

"Perhaps so, but I haven't the courage this morning to look forward. It is all I can do to-day to face the present. I hear the carriage; good-bye, Helen,"—he bent and kissed her—"you have been the one joy of my life; remember that."

As he released her, he said to his son who had entered the room, "I am glad you have won her, Macavoy. I could never have let her go out of the family. Be good to her, always,——" and he was gone.

Denning did not go to his office that day. When not on the street, he was in one of the anterooms of the County committee, where, by means of private telephone and telegraph lines, he was in communication with his lieutenants throughout the State, who reported, from time to time, how the battle waged.

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From these reports it was evident that the danger lay in the more remote, outlying districts.

Towards night, Hollingshead remarked confidentially to a friend, "If that report had come out two days later, Denning wouldn't have had a ghost of a show; if two days earlier, he could have made a clean sweep; as it is, it's going to make things pretty close."

"It shows," said the other, "what a tremendous hold he has on the people, that he could rally them as he has after such a blow. If it hadn't been for that report, he would have buried Knox out of sight."

Loss of sleep, loss of food, and the terrible strain began to tell on Denning at last; and when the polls closed and there was absolutely nothing more to be done—not a wire to be pulled or a key to manipulate—nothing but to wait through hours of suspense, the "blue devils" took possession of him; he seemed on the verge of a physical and mental collapse. He was too weak to leave the room, but Hollingshead ordered food and stimulants brought to him. The former stood untouched, but shorn of all sense of further responsibility, he partook freely of the latter, and under their first effect, seemed stronger and more hopeful.

The first reports to come in were favorable. Rockland led, with an astounding majority; then the capital city and one or two adjoining towns gave good majorities. The next return was from his own county, with a big pile of votes in his favor. But Denning's face did not relax, nor did Hollingshead's. They were thinking of the doubtful counties yet to come. Soon the returns were coming thick and fast, favorable and unfavorable, but the former well in the majority.

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Outside, in the densely packed street, cheer after cheer went up, as names and figures flashed out in the darkness, above thousands of eager, upturned faces. Men and women shouted the names of their favorite candidates, then burst into round after round of applause as another report shot out upon the great white page of light. And above all, jubilant, exultant, rose the shrill, composite voice of the multiform, ubiquitous small boy, as he tore up and down the street, dragging behind him every available piece of firewood, while here and there, a red glare told of premature bonfires already lighted by his eager hands.

In the large committee rooms, scores of telegraph instruments and typewriters clicked and clattered. Within the railings, men shouted the returns to those outside, and the throngs of waiting men cheered and cursed alternately, while on all sides bets were climbing higher and higher and money was swiftly changing hands.

But it was in the anterooms, where the candidates themselves awaited the returns, that the stress and tension of those long hours were concentrated.

In Denning's room, few words were spoken, and those only in subdued tones. Aside from the necessary clerks, but two men, close friends of Denning's, were present with him and Hollingshead. The din and confusion of the outer rooms and the uproar from the street below, seemed only to emphasize the strained silence in which they sat.

Suddenly there was a lull. Returns came but slowly. Outside, the crowds clamored impatiently, but Denning and Hollingshead knew that the worst was now to come. The doubtful counties were to be heard

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from ; more remote and with scattered population. Denning glanced at his watch ; it was nearly nine, the last returns would not be in much before midnight. Three hours ! He turned to the bottle beside him and drank deeply, though Hollingshead shook his head warningly.

The returns came dropping in, sometimes in twos and threes, but oftener singly ; returns that were received in that little room in dead silence, though outside, the crowds still cheered.

Again and again during the next hour, Denning had recourse to the bottle at his side, till Hollingshead rising, took it from him, but the other, already coming under the secondary effect of what he had taken, scarcely noticed what he did.

“Never mind, Denning,” one of his friends assured him, “there’s other counties yet to hear from.”

Denning nodded, heavy-eyed. “Yes, there’s other counties yet to hear from,” he muttered.

Almost as he spoke, there came returns from a county favorable to him, giving him a good majority. He brightened for an instant, smiled, for the first and only time that night, then complacently repeating the words of his friend, sank into a semi-unconscious state.

No one attempted to rouse him, for that was the last favorable report. Those that followed for the next hour piled up heavy majorities for Knox, so that by eleven o’clock, the election was practically decided.

From the window of Denning’s private office, over the North Western bank, Helen, accompanied by Mrs. Hollingshead and Tom, watched the returns flashing back and forth in the darkness. Her grief, as the later ones came in, was piteous to behold, the more so,

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because she strove so bravely to conceal it. At last, Tom could bear it no longer.

"Helen!" he took her hands in his strong, firm grasp, "I can't see you tortured this way any longer. There is no use in staying; it is practically all over, nothing could help father now. Let me take you home."

"Not home, Tom," she pleaded; "take me to him. Think what he must be suffering! Oh Tom, not even you know, as I do, what this means to him. It will kill him."

"But you could do him no good, Helen, and it is no fit place for you," he expostulated. "It will be far better to go home and get everything in readiness for his coming, when he returns."

Mrs. Hollingshead added her entreaties and Helen yielded. Part of Tom's anxiety to get her home was on his father's account but he said nothing to Helen of his fears. The carriage was waiting for them at the street entrance, so Helen did not have to encounter the stares of the crowd. As soon as she and Mrs. Hollingshead were safely home, Tom ordered the coachman to drive to the committee rooms, and after instructing him to wait outside, he eagerly sought the anteroom which he entered quietly with a pass key.

He took in the entire situation at a glance, and at a sign from Hollingshead, seated himself near his father.

For another hour they waited, Denning occasionally rousing to ask some question, but even when he heard the reply, he did not realize its import.

"Hadn't we better take him home now?" Tom whispered to Hollingshead.

He shook his head. "Better not attempt it. It

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would only rouse him for nothing, and he would not consent to go."

The adjoining rooms and the street grew strangely quiet. The crowds having learned the results and shouted and caroused to their full satisfaction, had dispersed.

By twelve o'clock, the last returns were in and the tired clerks began preparations for leaving. Denning, through exhaustion and the effect of the liquor, had sunk into a heavy, unnatural sleep.

"Better get him home without waking him, if you can," said one.

"Don't believe you can do it," said another. "He's a heavy man to carry and the elevator isn't running."

Hollingshead stepped to the front. "You men stand back a bit. We'll have to rouse him enough to get him out of here, but if he only sees Tom and me, he may not realize where he is."

Then, as the others stepped back, he shook Denning, gently at first; then with more force.

"Wake up, old man," he cried cheerfully, "it's time to shut up shop and go home, you know."

But Denning's mind still retained its hold on the last events of which he had been cognizant.

"Go home?" he repeated, rousing himself sufficiently to sit upright: "No, I'm not going home till the returns are in."

"Better go home and rest a while, Denning; we'll send the returns up later," said one of his friends.

"I tell you I won't leave till they're all in," he persisted.

"Mac," said Hollingshead, still trying to speak

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cheerfully," the returns are all in, but—we're in the minority, old man."

"Minority?" he repeated, catching only the last words. "Minority, you say? Well, there's other counties yet to hear from," he responded readily.

"No, Macavoy; no. There are no more to hear from; the last one's in."

Something in his tone more than the words arrested the wandering mind and recalled Denning to himself.

"What's that you say, Hollingshead?" He struggled to his feet, and facing Hollingshead, his filmy eyes seemed striving to pierce through the veil that obscured their vision. They succeeded too, for in another instant, the old steel-like gleam flashed from them, as he demanded, "The last one's in, did you say? Are the returns all in?"

"All in, Mac."

There was an instant of strained, breathless silence.

"And I—have *lost*?" he demanded, with terrible emphasis.

Hollingshead's voice broke in a great sob: "Yes, you've lost, Mac;" he struggled to say, "but don't look like that, old man; there'll be other chances."

No one who saw could ever forget the mingled rage and despair in Denning's eyes, as they stared helplessly at Hollingshead. His face grew almost purple; he straightened himself and raised his right arm as though about to speak. His lips moved, but only a strange rattling came from his throat. He swayed, recovered himself, reeled again, and but for his friends would have fallen to the floor.

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They raised him quickly—his face livid, his eyes fixed, but still breathing—and sweeping the littering mass of papers from the long table, threw their coats across it and laid him on the couch thus improvised. A clerk sprang to the telephone near by and summoned a physician. When he arrived a few moments later, he found the rooms filled, for the news of Denning's seizure had spread as though by magic. He glanced keenly at the unconscious man and shook his head.

"No hope," he said to those standing near, "who is his regular physician?"

"Dr. Grimshaw is the family physician, I believe," said one.

"Better send for him, though there is nothing can be done. He may live till morning, but no longer. Clear these rooms at once, and get him home as quickly as possible."

Dr. Grimshaw came, and under his directions preparations were made for carrying Denning downstairs to his carriage, still waiting to convey him home; while Tom, taking a cab, hastened on in advance, dreading the task of breaking the news to Helen.

The latter, watching and listening, in an agony of suspense, for her father's return, with the first sound of wheels upon the driveway, rushed to the door and was running down the steps, when she stopped with a sharp cry on seeing the cab with its solitary passenger.

"Tom, what does this mean? Where is father?" she cried, as he sprang from the cab.

"He is coming, dear; with his friends," he said,

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putting his arm about her and drawing her into the house.

“Coming, with friends?” she repeated, then catching sight of Tom’s face as the light fell upon it, she exclaimed: “Oh Tom, something terrible has happened! What is it? Is father dead?”

He drew her close. “No, dear; he is living, but he is unconscious, and he will never regain consciousness.”

“A stroke?” Mrs. Hollingshead exclaimed, who had met them at the door.

“Yes, apoplexy.”

A long, piteous wail broke from Helen’s lips: “Oh, father! My poor, dear father! Tom, if you had only let me go to him as I wanted to, and comfort him—now, it is too late!”

“My darling, it would have been no use. Besides, dear, he did not suffer, as you think. He was asleep while the unfavorable returns were coming in; he knew nothing of them, and when we had to break the news to him at last, he only realized it for an instant; then—everything was all over.”

Under his soothing words and caresses, her sobs quieted, and when Mrs. Hollingshead left the room to fulfil Tom’s directions, nothing would keep her from accompanying and assisting her.

Upstairs, in the brightly-lighted, pleasant apartments, loving hands made ready for the sad home-coming, and a little later, strong, gentle hands bore the unconscious form into the house and up the broad, winding stairs; and so the proud, dominant master of the house came, for the last time, to his own.

Just before the day dawned, the end came, but so quietly that not even the physicians, watching, knew

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the exact instant when the strong, indomitable spirit deserted the body which had so ignominiously failed it at the last.

Hours later, young Denning and Hollingshead made a startling discovery. On opening Denning's desk, in his private sitting room, they found in the top, right-hand drawer, a new revolver, loaded, placed there as though with some definite and deadly purpose. Beside it, was a brief note, to the effect that he had never known the meaning of the word "fail," and it was now too late to learn; that to him, its only meaning was the end of life itself. The note also stated that he had made a new will, giving to Helen, in addition to her own fourth of the property, the share originally bequeathed to his wife. A brief search disclosed the will, which had been executed on the Saturday preceding; and later inquiry developed the further fact that the revolver had been purchased at a late hour Saturday night, just when the outlook was the darkest. It was evident that Denning had intended, in case of failure, to take his own life, and had laid the plans for his death with the same method and foresight which had characterized his life.

As a sculptor, with a few deft touches, works almost miraculous changes in the marble beneath his hands, so, in the face of Denning, Death wrought a marvellous change. The coarseness and sensuality, the hard, tense lines of unscrupulous ambition, disappeared under his softening, refining touch; but not even he could add the lines which should have been there, but had never existed. So those taking their last look,

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saw, not the face of a conquered, broken man, but of one reposing in the calm majesty of superb strength ; as though, conscious of his own powers, he silently defied the world ; but yet, a face utterly devoid of love or benevolence.

Gazing upon it, Dr. Guthrie, who had called as a friend, to pay his last respects, said :

“He was a man of wonderful powers, wonderful ! The only pity was that they were not devoted to loftier aims. With his irresistible personality, his indomitable will, his marvellous power over men, as an altruist, instead of an egoist, his life would have been sublime !”

Mrs. Hollingshead, standing near, smiled sadly at the memory of her own words of long ago, which his words recalled ; but her husband only murmured brokenly, as he turned away :

“Poor old Mac !”

On the following Sunday morning, there were few pulpits in Rockland in which some allusion, direct or indirect, was not made to Denning ; some holding up his better qualities for emulation ; some using his life as a warning against undue ambition and pride.

But none left the profound impression that was made by Dr. Guthrie, whose only allusion was veiled in the Scripture lesson read that morning, selected from the fourteenth chapter of the book of that impassioned poet, Isaiah, and closing with these strangely appropriate and impressive words :

“The grave from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming : it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth ; it hath

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raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, 'Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us?' Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols. . . . How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"

THE END

